

Advocacy for Systems Change: What Does it Take?
A Research Report on the Role of Advocacy in Collective Impact and its
Potential for Generation Next

Capstone Paper

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Executive Summary

This report serves to identify points of potential for Twin Cities' cross-sector collaborative, Generation Next, in pursuing advocacy efforts. Attention is paid specifically to the role of and recommendations for the backbone organization, or Generation Next staff, as this research was done on their behalf.

The literature on collective impact and advocacy suggests that a shared sense of purpose, grassroots engagement, and backbone staff serving as an educator in the process are all necessary components of successful advocacy efforts. The case studies conducted on four StriveTogether partnerships and one health collaborative largely echo these points, as well as suggest the necessity of action networks in identifying issues, highlight the role and necessity of strong data as a tool for advocacy, the role of the leadership council, and the strength of advocating at the local level. Data from Generation Next staff interviews provided suggestions about Generation Next's current internal capacity for advocacy, the current sense of purpose for advocacy among the staff, and other information about staff perceptions which are significant in organizing and initiating advocacy work as a small organization.

Based on this research, there is a great deal of potential for advocacy for Generation Next. We provide seven recommendations which we believe will provide essential guidance in implementing and maintaining a successful advocacy strategy:

1. Build leadership council understanding of and support for involvement in advocacy
2. Establish a common purpose for advocacy among staff and the leadership council
3. Establish sustaining action networks
4. Implement a process for identifying issues and engaging in advocacy efforts
5. Establish a routinized process by which data are disseminated effectively for advocacy and continuous improvement
6. Dedicate additional resources to Generation Next's advocacy work
7. Continuously explore the social and organizational networks and connections that exist in the Twin Cities' education policy field

These recommendations are grounded solely in the research conducted this Spring 2017, which does have limitations in its scope and methodology. These limitations are described in the report. Therefore, we also recommend conducting future research on additional Strive partnerships' advocacy strategies and comparing those to the five case studies we examined. Despite the limitations, however, each facet of the research strongly suggested that advocacy is essential for systems change, and we therefore conclude that Generation Next should engage in advocacy efforts in order to achieve their mission of closing the achievement gap.

Introduction

Systems change is often difficult to predict or control, yet without it, even powerful well-intentioned coalitions can experience stagnation in outcomes as measured and evaluated by their own well-thought out plans. This can be evidenced by examining The Minnesota Report Card results of academic achievement data in the Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools over the past several years, where changes in the academic achievement gap are incremental, at best. The following pages attempt to provide some answers to several questions asked by our client as to what is required to pursue advocacy work. The results of our research are rich with some new and confirming information and, we think, a great beginning to furthering the idea that advocacy is not only possible within the context of Generation Next, but necessary for systems change.

More specifically, the questions this research attempts to answer include:

1. What does the literature say about collective impact models in education policy? What are similar coalitions or networks doing in terms of advocacy? What were the inputs and outputs of those advocacy efforts?
2. How might advocacy help Generation Next achieve its goals?
3. What would it take to pursue advocacy in terms of internal capacity, structure, processes, and stakeholders? What are the main barriers and/or risks to implementing these efforts?

Methodology

Introduction to the Research Approach

The overall methodological approach for investigating the identified research questions posed in this study were primarily qualitative. The research methods were aligned to the purpose and informed by the specific research questions. Within the investigative portion of the research project, and to better understand the selected StriveTogether network sites within their specific context, it was necessary for the methods to elicit how advocacy work is being carried out and what is required to ensure success. For this reason, we chose to conduct interviews and create a case study analysis.

The research posed in this study incorporates three key components:

1. Suggestions from the literature around advocacy and collective impact
2. A series of in-depth case studies on existing collective impact models (four Strive partnerships and one statewide health collaborative)
3. An analysis of Generation Next staff perceptions of potential for advocacy

Methods of Data Collection and Information Gathering

Our first research component consisted of a literature review of advocacy and collective impact. Because the literature around advocacy specifically within collective impact initiatives is sparse, we conducted both of these literature reviews to pinpoint where they could complement one another. Due to the time constraints of this four-month capstone project, we were only able to conduct a limited assessment of pre-existing literature and websites.

Our second step involved conducting a comprehensive scan of the participating Strive network members. *Appendix 1* contains the list in its entirety along with details surrounding characteristics of each Strive member. Because we could not conduct research on them all, we decided to focus on key characteristics to narrow down selections. The criteria for narrowing included:

- The structure of the leadership council or executive boards
- The makeup and size of the backbone or operations staff
- Size of its coalition, partners and network
- Any evidence of current advocacy efforts underway
- The sustaining status designation, which represents the level the partnership has reached within the Strive network

The sites chosen include the Commit! Partnership in Dallas, TX, the P16Plus Council of Greater Bexar County, TX, the Albany Promise in NY, and Raise D.C. Research suggests

the potential for a collective impact coalition to engage in advocacy depends on the size of the coalition, the internal staff capacity for advocacy activities, and the degree to which the leadership council is composed of similar or widely-diverging partners or members in terms of sector, perspectives, and political views. These primary factors were used to determine which partnerships to interview and study. Those partnerships who responded to our requests and participated in interviews for our research are represented in the case studies portion of our report. We conducted semi-structured interviews using pre-designed questions (see *Appendix 2*). The case studies draw information from the interviews, public websites and reports and the national Strive website.

In conjunction to reaching out to the four Strive members, we also interviewed a non-Strive collective impact organization in the healthcare industry, healthTIDE, to simply understand the idea of collective impact and advocacy as it is practiced outside of education. The data gathered from this interview informed our study of collective impact and advocacy work more generally.

The last major component of data collection consisted of interviews with Generation Next staff members to assess potential to pursue advocacy work and what is needed internally to ensure the pursuit of advocacy is attainable at this time. These interviews were designed more tightly than the case study interviews, and specific questions can be found in *Appendix 3*.

Additionally, we interviewed Daniel Sellers, Executive Director of EdAllies and a local expert in education advocacy, in order to gain insight about what an advocacy organization experiences as it works through its advocacy process, as well as to illuminate how Generation Next might experience this work themselves. Key messages from his interview can be found dispersed throughout the report, as we triangulated the results from the interview with data collected from case study participants, websites and other research articles.

Process and Analysis

An iterative process allowed our early research findings based on the literature to inform the analysis of our questions and selection of case study participants. This flexibility was needed to incorporate some of the learning from the research along with the needs of Generation Next. The findings from the literature reviews were synthesized with the interview data from the Strive sites and Generation Next staff. Final conclusions and recommendations were made by aggregating data from these three sources and noting themes that arose.

Limitations

A major limitation, in general, was related to the scarcity of comprehensive research on the topic of advocacy as it relates to systemic change that can be brought about by collective impact models. It was challenging to find documented evidence, and we propose this may be due to the rapidly changing dynamics of advocacy work, how communications and technologies have evolved and impacted the proliferation of networks directly involved in advocacy activities and how long this work, in general, has been observed.

Another important limitation we identified is in understanding the intricate number of networks that the selected case study participants had established as a part of their advocacy work. We did learn these relationships were important to the success of any advocacy effort, but really did not assess what constitutes a successful ‘network’ relationship and how best a backbone organization might go about choosing partners and co-leads, while also remaining neutral or bipartisan.

And finally, we were unable to access the leadership council, which would have enhanced our understanding of Generation Next’s current potential for advocacy and the leadership council’s level of support.

Collective Impact Literature

We began our research with an extensive review of the literature on collective impact and its historical roots as the Strive model is grounded in this theory of change, and it is important to understand this model before determining whether advocacy is compatible with this work.

The History of Collective Impact

Though the concept of collective impact was first articulated in the 2011 Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR) by John Kania and Mark Kramer, cross-sector collaborations date all the way back to the 19th century with the birth of settlement houses, which were community-based shelters that provided a wide array of services, including education, to those who lived in extreme poverty. This collaborative, community model evolved over the next century into school-based neighborhood centers during the Great Depression, and even further evolved into Promise Neighborhoods in the late 1990s. Now, coalitions like the StriveTogether network adopt a similar collaborative approach, but with an emphasis on education specifically as a way to promote larger-scale social change.¹

Common critiques and observations across both historical and current collaborations include:²

- Shallow involvement in policymaking; too much reliance on funding strategies to affect systems change
- Data collected by the collaborations are not used in a meaningful way
- Limited ability of collaborations to affect systemic change because spikes of interest tend to respond to periods of crisis which eventually pass
- Prevalence of top-down interventions despite an emphasis on grassroots engagement

The Current Model for Collective Impact

According to Kania and Kramer, who are the creators of the collective impact model, collective impact efforts rely on the support of 1) a common understanding of the problem (shared purpose), 2) a shared measurement system, 3) mutually reinforcing activities, 4) ongoing communication, and 5) a staffed, independent backbone organization.³⁴

¹ Henig, J. R., Riehl, C. J., Rebell, M. A., & Wolff, J. R. Putting collective impact in context: A review of the literature on local cross-sector collaboration to improve education. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University, Department of Education Policy and Social Analysis (2015).

² Ibid.

³ Kania, John, and Mark Kramer. "Collective Impact." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2011). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact.

⁴ Generation Next staff acts as the backbone staff in the collective impact model.

They also identify three conditions that are necessary for a collective impact initiative to thrive:⁵

1. An influential champion is the most critical component
 - a. This leader must be passionately focused on solving a problem but willing to let the participants figure out the answers for themselves, rather than promoting his or her particular point of view.
2. Adequate financial resources
3. A sense of urgency for change
 - a. Conducting research and publicizing a report that captures media attention and highlights the severity of the problem is a way to create the necessary sense of urgency to persuade people to come together.

The Role of the Backbone Organization in Collective Impact

At a roundtable sponsored by the Collective Impact Forum, scholars and practitioners discussed community engagement in collective impact. From review of the transcript, we gained some valuable insights about the role of the backbone organization in a collective impact initiative, which sparked further research on this topic. One participant at the roundtable spoke directly on the issue:

From a backbone organization's perspective, it's important to understand that being the backbone doesn't mean you are in control. At some level, if you want to have the community engaged in a process, it has to be the community's process, not the backbone's. That is often difficult for people to accept because they might assume they can take control and move the process according to their timetable, and that's not the case.⁶

Other participants grappled with the differences between grasstops⁷ and grassroots efforts, stating that many collective impact initiatives feel like grasstops efforts even when community engagement seems to be a priority.⁸ A more recent SSIR article written from the StriveTogether perspective relates to this notion, stating that,

⁵ Hanleybrown, Fay, John Kania, and Mark Kramer. "Channeling change: Making collective impact work." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2012). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work.

⁶ Barnes, Melody, Paul Born, Richard Harwood, Steve Savner, Stacey Stewart, and Martin Zanghi. "Roundtable on Community Engagement and Collective Impact." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2014). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/roundtable_on_community_engagement_and_collective_impact.

⁷ Grasstops efforts rely on individuals with high public profiles who raise public attention or influence decision makers on particular issues.

⁸ Ibid. "Roundtable on Community Engagement and Collective Impact."

Most people believed backbones could achieve collective impact on their own, not realizing that their role was supporting community leaders and members to use data of all kinds together to change everyday behavior.⁹

Additionally, according to the Collective Impact Forum, to achieve systems change, you must engage those that they trust most, who are often the producers of service and partners in your outcome delivery systems. This means true collaborative efforts must build front line participation as a critical strategy for collective impact.¹⁰

If we look at the definition of systems change, we find that it is, “A change in the way decisions are made about policies, programs, and resource allocation so that the impact reaches an entire community.”¹¹ Since system interactions are often incredibly complex, the best way to plan for systems change is to properly define the problem and then identify who should be considered as part of the system based on that definition. In order to achieve full systems change, all parts of the system have to be identified and brought together to develop the solution. Furthermore, a distinction must be made between participation and engagement. Participation concerns stakeholders making their voices heard before decision-makers, while engagement is a deliberative process where citizens influence decisions and action results.¹² Malcolm X once said,

If you give people a thorough understanding of what it is that confronts them, and the basic causes that produce it, they'll create their own program; and when the people create a program, you get action. When their 'leaders' create the program you get no action.¹³

By engaging and empowering those who are most involved and affected by current systems, you are more likely to address the true, root causes of flaws or disparities within those systems.¹⁴ In *Appendix 4*, you can see an image provided by the Collective Impact Forum that shows what different levels of public and frontline engagement look like in a collective impact framework. From informing to co-leading, the chart presents how a backbone staff can increase community involvement in its efforts to achieve systems change.

⁹ Edmondson, Jeff and Parvathi, Santhosh-Kumar. “It’s About Results at Scale, Not Collective Impact.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (2017).

¹⁰ Schmitz, Paul. “The Culture of Collective Impact”. Collective Impact Forum (2014). <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/blogs/38876/culture-collective-impact>.

¹¹ Milnar, Sarah. “Community Engagement and Participation in Collective Impact Initiatives”. *College of Professional Studies Professional Projects*. Marquette University (2014).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Fisher, R. Let the people decide: Neighborhood organizing in America. (Updated edition). New York, NY: Twayne Publishers (1994).

¹⁴ Christens, B. D. Public relationship building in grassroots community organizing: Relational intervention for individual and systems change. *Journal of American Psychology*, 38(7), 886-900 (2008).

In summary, from our review of the literature on collective impact, we find that historical efforts, critiques of collective impact initiatives, and discussions surrounding the role of the backbone staff in collaborative efforts all emphasize the importance of engaging the community at a more grassroots level. Since the community is closest to the root issues, their engagement in the collective impact process is crucial to achieving systems change. Furthermore, the literature touches on the need for a public sense of urgency to capture and facilitate community involvement, as well as the support of influential leaders that can champion the issues. Strive initiatives in particular can utilize the strength of their data to publicize and highlight the severity of specific issues in the news or media in order to gain the necessary attention from community members and leaders.

Advocacy Literature

"Of all the functions of the nonprofit¹⁵ sector, few are more critical than that of advocacy, or representing alternative perspectives and pressing them on public and private decision makers."

Lester Salamon, 1995¹⁶

Engaging in advocacy efforts can be a powerful tool for nonprofit organizations to broaden their reach and work towards systems change; however, the complexity and ambiguity of this process frequently deters organizations from getting involved. This portion of our literature review seeks to explain what it takes to engage in advocacy effectively, give examples of some more frequently used advocacy activities, and briefly apply the notion of advocacy to working in coalitions.

First, because advocacy can be defined in numerous ways, it is critical to establish a universal definition. Scholars in the public and nonprofit sectors agree that Craig Jenkins offers the most all-encompassing definition of advocacy as "any attempt to influence the decisions of an institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest."¹⁷ There is also general agreement that advocacy can be understood as a loose concept encompassing a vast array of activities: conducting research, analyzing issues, educating elected officials, building relationships with elected officials, litigation, regulatory efforts, media advocacy, grassroots organizing, grassroots lobbying, or direct lobbying. Of these strategies, the literature reveals

¹⁵ We apply literature on nonprofit advocacy to this report for three reasons: 1) Generation Next's fiscal agent, The Greater Twin Cities United Way, is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, 2) the Strivetogether Network recently transitioned to nonprofit status, and 3) much of the literature surrounding nonprofit advocacy is tailored towards organizations seeking to begin their engagement in advocacy, which parallels the organizational context within which Generation Next is operating.

¹⁶ Salamon, Lester M. "Explaining nonprofit advocacy: An exploratory analysis." *Center for Civil Society Studies Working Paper Series* 21 (2002).

¹⁷ Reid, Elizabeth J. "Understanding the word "advocacy": Context and use." *Structuring the inquiry into advocacy* 1 (2000): 1-7.; Kimberlin, Sara E. "Advocacy by nonprofits: Roles and practices of core advocacy organizations and direct service agencies." *Journal of Policy Practice* 9, no. 3-4 (2010): 164-182.

that the ones most inclined to bring about policy change are grassroots organizing, where the people advocating for policy change are the people that would be most directly impacted by the policy, lobbying for legislation and educating the public by making original research accessible to the public. These activities can be used individually, in conjunction with one another, or successively; and depending on how they are used, can range in goals or expected outcomes, intensity level, resources required for implementation, who they involve in the act of advocating, and the level(s) of government in which they can be most effective.¹⁸

What does it take to do advocacy well?

Because it is often difficult for people and organizations to define advocacy in the first place, figuring out what it takes to do advocacy well can be particularly challenging. Knowing whether or not your organization has the capacity to do advocacy work is critical to the advocacy process, however. The TCC Group, a strategic planning, evaluation, and programming consulting firm for the social sector, sought to answer this question with the help of an advocacy logic model (*Appendix 5*). The logic model seeks to pinpoint the necessary components for effective advocacy work, and this section attempts to answer the question of “what it takes” using components of this logic model and additional scholarly research.

Leadership Capacity

Scholars suggest that an organization’s leadership capacity is its most critical component for developing and implementing an advocacy strategy. For organizations involved in advocacy, it is critical for senior staff and the board of directors, especially, to have a clear, common understanding of the purpose behind their organization’s advocacy efforts and for those leaders to have an external focus on behalf of their organization.¹⁹ Together these components make for a leadership body that can both effectively motivate internal staff in their advocacy work and have the capacity to reach out and engage stakeholders. The TCC Group suggests that, for the most part, leadership’s role is not to actually *do* the advocating, but to support internal staff in their implementation of advocacy work.²⁰ Stand For Your Mission, an organization dedicated to helping organizations involve their board members in advocacy suggests that in order to make the most out of board members’ connections and to keep them satisfied, high-level leadership staff should facilitate conversations with them that bring them towards a common understanding and sense of purpose behind advocacy efforts.

¹⁸ Additionally, Daniel Sellers views EdAllies’ advocacy work as a means to change the narrative about *whole issues*.

¹⁹ This clarity is necessary for two reasons, according to Raynor et. al.: 1) board members have the capacity to connect their organization to other resources or networks they are a part of, so they must have a clear understanding of the organization’s advocacy efforts in order to make those connections, and 2) board members need to be fully aware of the organization’s advocacy efforts because if some of the issues for which the organization is advocating are more political, their external reputations could be at stake.

²⁰ Raynor, et. al., “What makes an effective advocacy organization,” p. 14.; “The Power of Board Advocacy: A Discussion Guide for Boards,” Stand For Your Mission (2014). <http://standforyourmission.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Discussion-Guide.pdf>.

See *Appendix 6* for Stand Your Mission’s guide for this type of conversation.

The Right Venue

The question of which venues are targeted in advocacy efforts is particularly critical in developing and implementing an advocacy strategy. Scholars Anne Buffardi, Robert Pekkanen, and Steven Smith define a “venue” as having three components: a branch of government, domain type (bureaucratic agency, legislators, or political party), and level of government (federal, state, county, city, local).²¹ They examined the activities of nonprofits who engage in advocacy work but do not identify it as their main role or priority and found that the majority of those nonprofits targeted their efforts towards state bureaucratic agencies and state and local elected officials.²²

Expertise

Expertise, or technical skill, is also a critical component for organizations that are not only engaged in advocacy work, but also *effective* in that work.²³ Jeffrey Berry suggests that organizations are well suited for advocacy if they have two components: staff who are specialized in issue areas and can track those issues for an extended period of time and the ability to interpret quality data and research into original reports--preferably ones that are not filled with overly-technical language.²⁴ According to the TCC Group, this expertise needs to be compounded with an organization’s capacity to disseminate its expertise to the right people--other organizations, constituents, beneficiaries, elected officials, and/or the media.²⁵ Expert knowledge in the organization’s issue area is not the only necessary component to “expertise,” however. It is also important for staff to have a strong understanding of the complexities and nuances inherent in both the political environment and the policymaking process at the relevant levels of government.²⁶

Adaptive Capacity

The TCC Group suggests that an organization’s adaptive capacity also plays a large role in its ability to effectively advocate. Adaptive capacity is defined as an organization’s “...ability to monitor, assess, and adapt the organization’s work successfully to changing environments, both inside and outside the organization...activities commonly associated with organizational adaptive capacity include evaluating programs and services, planning, collaborating, partnering, and strategizing.”²⁷ A significant part of an organization’s

²¹ Buffardi, Anne L., Robert J. Pekkanen, and Steven Rathgeb Smith. "Shopping or specialization? Venue targeting among nonprofits engaged in advocacy." *Policy Studies Journal* 43, no. 2 (2015): 188-206.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Berry, Jeffrey M. "Effective advocacy for nonprofits." *Nonprofit Advocacy and the Policy Process*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute (2001): 1-8.; Rees, Susan. "Effective advocacy on limited resources." *Nonprofit Advocacy and the Policy Process*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute (2001): 9-16.; Avner, Marcia. "Advocacy, Lobbying, and Social Change." *The Jossey-Bass handbook of nonprofit leadership and management* (2010): 347-374.

²⁴ Berry, "Nonprofit Advocacy and the Policy Process," 1-8.

²⁵ Raynor, Jared, Peter York, and Shao-Chee Sim. "What makes an effective advocacy organization." *Los Angeles: TCC Group and The California Endowment* (2009).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Raynor, et. al., "What makes an effective advocacy organization."

adaptive capacity rests in its ability to build, maintain, and manage strategic partnerships, networks, and collaborations. Those initiatives allow the organization to expand its reach, build its resource base, and reinforce its message through multiple channels. In order to do this work well, however, organizations must also have a keen understanding of their unique strengths in their respective policy field(s) and “position [themselves] strategically so as to make the optimal contribution to success on an issue.”²⁸ Organizations must turn their focus to the external environment in this work.

Advocacy in Coalitions

Research shows that, for nonprofits in particular, advocacy is best done through coalitions because that structure allows for resource-sharing and a space for collective troubleshooting among “like-minded” organizations.²⁹ Politicians at all levels of government take coalitions’ viewpoints seriously because they represent a group of several organizations who have, hypothetically, already agreed on how to address a specific issue or achieve a specific policy goal. For the advocacy work to be successful, however, it is critical for the coalition to remain in tact and united in its mission, vision, and goals--a breakdown in the coalition has a negative impact on the achievement of policy goals.³⁰ In their research on advocacy for nonprofits in coalitions, Fyall et. al. highlight a nonprofit professional who paraphrases a typical response from a legislator regarding coalitions being united in the issues for which they advocate: “‘If you’re all on the same page, that’s great, but if you’re not, I don’t have time to sort it out amongst you. I’m going to move on to something else.’”³¹ The unification this legislator speaks of works in concert with the necessity of a common purpose among organizational leadership.

Frequently Used Advocacy Activities

Once an organization has built up the capacity for advocacy involvement, that organization should then begin exploring ways in which it can begin the process of engaging in advocacy work. The following are advocacy strategies that are commonly referenced in the literature as being particularly effective at producing policy change. It should be noted, however, that these activities are frequently used in combination with one another and at different periods of an organization’s advocacy efforts.

Grassroots Organizing

Grassroots organizing refers to “building, engaging, preparing, and mobilizing a base of supporters,” but with a particular emphasis on engaging the people that will actually be

²⁸ Raynor, et. al., “What makes an effective advocacy organization,” p. 20.

²⁹ Fyall, Rachel, and Michael McGuire. “Advocating for policy change in nonprofit coalitions.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 44, no. 6 (2015): 1274-1291.; Avner, Marcia, “*Advocacy, Lobbying, and Social Change*,” 347-374.; Weible, Christopher M., and Paul A. Sabatier. “A guide to the advocacy coalition framework.” *Handbook of public policy analysis: theory, politics, and methods* (2007): 123-136.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Fyall et. al, “Advocating for policy change in nonprofit coalitions,” 1286.

impacted by the policy or proposal being considered.³²

- Grassroots organizing is the most critical component to a nonprofit's advocacy work.³³
 - It activates community networks and engages citizens who have a vested, personal interest in the outcomes of a potential policy
 - The issue being advocated for is carried by citizens--constituents of elected officials
 - Elected officials might be more inclined to respond to an issue if it is raised by a significant constituent base, rather than an organization, because those constituents have the power to hold their elected officials accountable for their actions.³⁴
- To do grassroots organizing effectively, it is necessary for organizations to be able to mobilize and build a strong base of support within the public.
 - Organizations should not only engage their current supporters, but also think of prospective supporters to "recruit."³⁵
 - Conducting a stakeholder analysis can be a helpful tool in the creation of a "target list."

Lobbying

The IRS defines lobbying as any attempt to influence legislation.

- Grassroots lobbying: encouraging the public to ask an elected official to vote a certain way on legislation
- Direct lobbying: any attempt to influence legislation by directly asking an elected official to vote a certain way on legislation³⁶

As long as there is no "ask" for the elected official to vote a certain way on a specific bill, there is no IRS restriction on an organization or coalition taking the time to educate an elected official on a specific set of issues or asking a legislator to support a particular issue area.³⁷

³² Avner, Marcia, *"Advocacy, Lobbying, and Social Change,"* 352.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*; Avner writes, "Constituents in their community have unique access to elected officials and, when constituents are involved in your advocacy and lobbying, they expand your impact through their relationships and numbers." (352)

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ According to the IRS, "*Legislation* includes action by Congress, any state legislature, any local council, or similar governing body, with respect to acts, bills, resolutions, or similar items (such as legislative confirmation of appointive office), or by the public in referendum, ballot initiative, constitutional amendment, or similar procedure. It does not include actions by executive, judicial, or administrative bodies."; "Lobbying," Internal Revenue Service, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying>.

³⁷ Among organizations who do not identify advocacy as their main priority (typically 501(c)(3) tax status organizations), lobbying is generally avoided as an advocacy strategy. Research shows that this is due to both the significant time and resources required to lobby well and the confusion that often arises around the tax regulations inherent in lobbying activities. 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations *can* engage in lobbying, but in order them to claim it as a tax-exempt activity, the organization must only spend a certain proportion of its expenditures on lobbying. "Lobbying," Internal Revenue Service.; "Measuring Lobbying Activity: Expenditure Test," Internal Revenue Service, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/measuring-lobbying-activity-expenditure-test>.; Buffardi, Anne L., Robert J. Pekkanen, and Steven Rathgeb Smith. "Shopping or specialization? Venue targeting among nonprofits engaged in

Lobbying requires both a keen understanding of the political arena (federal, state, city, local) in which the organization hopes to be influential and an awareness of the elected officials that actually need to be lobbied for support. Lobbying is a time-intensive activity because, for it to be successful, it is necessary for organizations to commit to constantly building and fostering relationships with elected officials and their staff. Most organizations who are committed to lobbying dedicate at least one staff member to the work, or they hire an external lobbyist.³⁸

Public Education

Educating the public is a form of advocacy that can be done through a wide array of activities including hosting educational conferences, publishing and disseminating original research and reports, and media advocacy.³⁹

- Media advocacy: an organization's effort to get media coverage on their issue(s)
 - Particularly potent form of public education for organizations that are more heavily driven by producing original research and aggregating and synthesizing data
 - Opportunity for organization to serve as an expert in the field⁴⁰
 - Requires organizations to put resources towards fostering relationships with members of the media
 - Particularly effective when combined with other efforts to educate the public and elected officials⁴¹

In summary, successful advocacy initiatives within organizations are those that choose the right venue in which to advocate--typically state and local level; have staff with technical and policy expertise; have the capacity to adapt to a changing environment; and have supportive, unified leadership. Among these components, senior leadership and the board united by a common purpose is arguably the most necessary and the element that likely precedes the rest. While the literature on advocacy is sparse as it relates to larger coalitions or specific collective impact coalitions, an analysis of both this more general advocacy literature and the collective impact literature discussed above reveals where the two concepts can complement one another: engagement in advocacy could address many of the critiques of the collective impact model.

advocacy." *Policy Studies Journal* 43, no. 2 (2015): 188-206.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ The data from our interview with Daniel Sellers supported this point as well; EdAllies utilizes qualitative "narrative reports" to provide information on best practices being developed and used in the field.

⁴⁰ Avner, Marcia, "Advocacy, Lobbying, and Social Change," 347-374.

⁴¹ This point was reiterated in our interview with Daniel Sellers; when the media is involved and directs public attention to a "newsworthy" cause or issue, this often naturally leads to action at the legislature. Daniel also echoed that different strategies are more or less effective depending on the issue, and that advocacy efforts are most impactful when done in conjunction with other forms or efforts.

Conclusions from the Literature Reviews

Many critiques of collective impact question who is involved in collaborative efforts and how they are engaged by the backbone staff. The advocacy literature indirectly addresses these critiques and offers ways in which collective impact coalitions can better work towards systems change. An analysis of the literature surrounding both collective impact and advocacy suggests that establishing a shared sense of purpose, effectively disseminating data to the right actors and grassroots organizing are key ways in which coalitions in the social sector could better engage in advocacy activities.

Shared sense of purpose

The collective impact model requires that members of a coalition have a shared understanding of the problem, as well as a shared measurement system and understanding of the results, or data. Likewise, when building leadership capacity in a coalition, the advocacy literature shows that it is critical for senior staff and board members to have a clear and common understanding of the purpose behind their organization's advocacy efforts. Developing a common understanding of the problem inherently leads to a common purpose for the coalition. Moreover, this shared sense of purpose among the members of a coalition, and among the leadership in particular, is the foundation for building internal capacity and is essential to the effective implementation of an advocacy agenda.

Backbone staff as an educator

As identified by the collective impact literature, two common critiques of cross-sector collaborations are 1) data collected by the collaborations is not used in a meaningful way, and 2) collaborations have a limited ability to affect systemic change because spikes of interest tend to respond to periods of crisis, which eventually pass. In response to the ineffective use of data by collaborations, the advocacy literature strongly suggests that organizations who advocate take on the role of an educator. Hiring staff that have technical expertise and the ability to interpret and translate quality data into reports that the public can understand is crucial for successful advocacy.

Equally important, organizations engaged in advocacy must know with whom to share information and how to circulate that information strategically. The collective impact literature shows that current initiatives are realizing that the backbone staff must realize their role as a supporting one, and that they need to empower community leaders and members to use data themselves so that together they can change everyday behavior. It is also useful to know that if a coalition does not wish to engage in formal lobbying, they are still legally able to educate elected officials without asking them to vote a certain way on a bill.

Both the collective impact and advocacy literature respond to the second critique by suggesting that publicizing data to highlight the severity of the problem can capture media

attention and create the urgency that is necessary for effective organizing. Additionally, media advocacy is one of the most potent forms of advocacy because it gives the organization an opportunity to serve as a public “expert,” which builds credibility and reputation.

Grassroots engagement

Other critiques of collective impact examine the nature of who is involved. The collective impact model recognizes the importance of engaging those who are most influenced by changes in policy and in practice. It also recognizes that full “collective impact” cannot be achieved without including the voices of those who are most affected by community issues. This is exemplified in historical efforts, where we can see that immersing leaders in the perspectives of the underserved members of society proved to be an important factor in progressing local and national legislation.

In parallel, the importance of engaging the community also appears in the advocacy literature, which suggests that grassroots organizing is the most critical form of advocacy due to its ability to activate community networks that have a vested, personal interest in the outcomes of a policy. However, despite this grassroots emphasis in the literature, many coalitions currently use outside, top-down intervention methods instead of receiving local buy-in and engagement. Coalitions must carefully examine the people they choose to engage in systems change effort. “Moving the needle” requires a recognition of frontline workers’ experiences, as they are the ones producing outcomes and change informally every day and are responsible for the implementation of new policies and practices.

Case Studies from StriveTogether Partnerships

Introduction to the case studies

In order to gain insight into the advocacy work of other collective impact coalitions, we examined five collaborations closely and analyzed the facets of their advocacy strategy within the context of their coalition and organization. Four of the five are Strive partnerships, similar to Generation Next in structure but varying in their approach to achieving their high level outcomes. Additionally, we reviewed a statewide health collaborative located in Madison, Wisconsin, which has engaged in advocacy in interesting ways as a coalition.

The StriveTogether collective impact model originated in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2006 and operated there in an successful and impactful way that has been replicated in over 68 communities.⁴² Generation Next is a collective impact coalition based on the StriveTogether model and is a national network member at the *Sustaining* level. Therefore, a significant portion of this research is based on qualitative data collection from other StriveTogether network member community partnerships who have also reached the *Sustaining* level and are engaged in advocacy efforts.

At the sustaining level, the Strive theory of action indicates that the Investment and Sustainability activities of the partnership should include “mobilizing the community to improve community level outcomes” and “develop plans to change, support, or inform local, state, or national policy to improve community level outcomes.”⁴³ Research from our case studies presented below has shown that various Strive partnerships have engaged in these activities in varying ways and to varying degrees, adapting and incorporating the model to their specific partnerships and communities. The strategies and outcomes of these efforts have also varied widely, and are summarized in the table below.

⁴² “StriveTogether Network Profile,” StriveTogether: Every Child. Cradle to Career, accessed February 1, 2017.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Case Study Summary Tables⁴⁴

Strive Site	Roles of Backbone Organization	Advocacy Strategy Highlights	Challenges	Other Key Findings
P16	<p>Utilizing data and frontline experiences to educate leadership and partners</p> <p>Vet & filter policy issues brought to the table</p> <p>Create advocacy statements with board members</p> <p>Writing letters and testifying</p>	<p>Advocacy statements are written; written letters and testimonies are disseminated to the public</p> <p>School district, city, and state levels</p> <p>Board votes on issues brought up by action networks; majority vote passes advocacy efforts through.</p>	<p>Building consensus through broad, generic advocacy statements</p> <p>Educating board members on systems change, what advocacy is and what it looks like</p>	<p>Most impact at the local level altering procedural processes and funding priorities</p> <p>Policy issues come directly from action networks and work committees</p> <p>Advocating in areas where the partnership has relationships</p> <p>Policy can be neutral when advocating for your students and community</p>
Dallas Commit!	<p>Staff serve as conveners and information distributors at grassroots and grasstops levels</p> <p>Staff publish and update an advocacy agenda on EarlyMattersDallas.org</p> <p>Bring items brought to them by action networks to the governing board</p>	<p>Level of advocacy effort on each issue depends on level of support from governing board and local buy-in</p> <p>Policy support council made up of action network members (subject matter experts and advocates)</p> <p>Sending 'action alerts' to engaged community members and groups</p> <p>Direct lobbying, grassroots organizing, several forms of advocacy</p>	<p>They stay out of major controversial issues or issues that the leadership council will disagree on; they choose "low-hanging fruit" issues for advocacy efforts</p> <p>Tension among districts</p> <p>External politics and "winning"</p>	<p>They do not advocate without superintendent support and strong data</p> <p>The governing board must approve the issues or policies the coalition supports</p> <p>Leadership council is sent updates when decisions are made</p> <p>They engage mainly in state-level advocacy, with specific criteria for engaging in local policy work. When advocating at the local level, they have high impact (strong relationships and supporting data).</p>

⁴⁴A full description of each case study is located in *Appendix 7*.

Strive Site	Roles of Backbone Organization	Advocacy Strategy Highlights	Challenges	Other Key Findings
Raise DC	<p>Systematically sharing data with partners and promoting collaboration</p> <p>Facilitates relationship building activities</p> <p>The operations staff is comprised of identified leads in the “Change Networks”</p>	<p>Use of data as a “flashlight” both to prove impact in support of policies and programs, and also to improve existing programs.</p> <p>“Change Networks” lead advocacy work: they help staff identify, articulate, and push advocacy items.</p>	<p>Persistence and Patience: understanding the problem and identifying the right people to carry the advocacy efforts takes time</p> <p>Identifying the “water carriers”</p> <p>Politics in the leadership council</p> <p>Simultaneous work on five outcome areas → advocacy work is spread too thin</p>	<p>Raise DC leadership is responsible for providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy • Policy recommendations • Alignment of public & private resources <p>Successes include securing transportation vouchers at the city level, and State-awarded high school diplomas for disconnected youth</p>
Albany Promise	<p>Staff focus on a rigorous data collection and analysis process; advocacy work needs to be backed by strong data that supports any intervention the coalition advocates for.</p>	<p>Policy work is driven by action networks, and leadership members who are involved in the issue area help lead the advocacy efforts</p> <p>Narrow, local focus primarily at the school district level</p>	<p>Changing the way people engage in advocacy; not simply signing on but looking at the data to identify the barriers and what is actually working</p>	<p>Successes include implementing a district wide kindergarten readiness assessment, implementing a non-social promotion policy in a specific network of charter schools, and advocating for a model for early childhood developmental screening</p>

A Non-Strive Case Study: healthTIDE of Wisconsin

We also conducted a final, condensed case study (not in the summary table) on a statewide health collaborative in Wisconsin, called *healthTIDE*. The full case study is detailed with the other Strive case studies in *Appendix 7*. The staff member we interviewed at healthTide explained that the partnership used to have a designated advocacy team; but this did not work out as planned and was ultimately dissolved. The members of the team found extreme difficulty in coming to a consensus around advocacy issues, and they were unable to get the necessary “muscle” behind their advocacy efforts as the partners who were engaged in advocacy weren’t aligned in their organizational work and motivation. Many people at the table weren’t particularly passionate or informed about the issues at hand and were not willing or able to invest significant time and effort into the cause.

The staff member described their success in advocacy as a result of effective work with the right partners on the right issue, at the local level. healthTIDE’s Early Childhood “stakeholder” team (much like one of Strive’s action networks) identified a childcare quality rating and improvement system as a strong, important, and worthy cause. They gained the support and momentum of willing partner advocates on the team whose organizations had an explicit interest in the cause, and now describe that work as a success. Their work on physical education legislation was initiated by one of their large and powerful partners, who was designated to push the legislation by their national office. healthTIDE was able to coordinate effective advocacy efforts around this, the staff member says, because the major muscle came from the American Heart Association, and other partners who were willing to join in on the effort did so because they weren’t required to contribute significant time or effort.

healthTIDE does not engage in community organizing, but they do provide systematic support, funding, and training to community organizers as they (the staff member) believe that it is a necessary aspect of systems change. They focus on making connections and building relationships between organizations that are aligned in their work and convening leaders and experts in issues to drive change both from the grassroots and grassroots levels. The key findings from this case study, as well as the four Strive partnerships studied, were considered in drawing the conclusions below.

Themes from the Case Studies

Data from the case studies were analyzed, aggregated, and compared extensively to identify major themes and commonalities, as well as suggestions for effective advocacy work in coalitions. In doing so, several conclusions and key points for Generation Next’s future advocacy efforts were drawn:

Advocacy work is primarily driven by groups of frontline action networks

One of the largest and most significant themes from this facet of research was the spearheading of advocacy efforts in all four Strive coalitions by action networks or similar

groups of subject matter experts working directly on the frontlines in education in their respective communities. These groups of individuals from partner organizations are present in all four Strive sites we interviewed, and in each partnership the groups are central in identifying the issues for which the partnerships advocate. Dallas Commit!'s advocacy work occurs entirely within those frontline action teams, and the leadership council is only informed when policy decisions are made, rather than acting as active participants in advocacy decisions and activities.

Both P16 in Texas and The Albany Promise only identify advocacy issues through the work of their action networks. At The Albany Promise, only those partners and leadership members who have been engaged in that specific area participate in advocacy efforts for that specific issue. At P16, the staff sift through the items brought up by their action networks to identify the ones they are well positioned to pursue. Raise DC! similarly relies on “change networks” to identify and lead advocacy efforts. This is significant insofar as the issues that are actually pursued for advocacy work are identified by frontline practitioners and subject matter experts who arguably have the most extensive insight into the biggest barriers in education.

Effective data use is key

An equally important finding was the immense focus on and necessity of strong, well-grounded data to inform and support advocacy efforts among the Strive sites. This was most emphasized in the Albany Promise case study, where the staff member interviewed continually reiterated the importance of strong data in the coalition's advocacy work in our interview with her. She described how extensive data can support a change in the way stakeholders think about advocacy and policy work; making sure that the policies advocated for are proven to be effective encourages more active engagement and better policies.

At Raise DC!, they use data as a “flashlight” to identify and illuminate the effectiveness of solutions they engage in advocacy for and to improve existing programs as they are implemented and evolved. This is similar to the perspective of P16, who additionally described data as a tool to begin conversations with key stakeholders around key issues. Each of the partnerships seemed to agree that data was a critical tool throughout the advocacy process, from identifying the right issues to engaging in the various advocacy activities themselves.

Get the leadership on board with advocacy, but full consensus is not necessary

Information was also gathered pertaining to the initial stages of advocacy work as a coalition and educating the important stakeholders about the nature of advocacy. This is of particular interest to Generation Next as they consider how and when to enter that space. During our interview with P16Plus of Greater Bear County (TX), Executive Director Judy McCormick stressed the importance of educating partners in the coalition on current policy

issues, communicating policy standpoints to the public, and how various forms of advocacy take shape. At Dallas Commit!, the persuasion of the leadership council to consent to advocacy work as a coalition took time and persistence, but although their role in advocacy is limited, their understanding of the nature, forms, and importance of advocacy to systems change was necessary for the coalition's success.

Among the four Strive sites, each had a different perspective surrounding the role of the leadership council and the level of agreement necessary among them in advocacy work. At The Albany Promise and at Raise DC!, only those leadership members who had a key stake and interest in the issue engaged in the advocacy work, and the others were not required to agree or participate. At Dallas Commit!, the leadership is considered in the decision process around which issues the coalition advocates for, but they are merely informed when the decision is made. This was similar to Daniel Sellers' perspective; EdAllies has to be considerate of their board when vetting an issue for which they might advocate. Therefore, they have established a skillful way to keep various board members engaged while also tempering and managing their various priorities and personal passions, as there is not only contention between various leaders' political views, but also personal agendas and priorities that tend to influence individual leaders' awareness and support of various issues. They are not directly engaged in the process or required to agree. P16, however, has their board vote on each issue and they are partially responsible for disseminating statements and participating in advocacy directly. The variety of ways that the leadership are engaged and involved in advocacy are of particular interest for Generation Next as they reconcile the competing interests of their leadership council members.

Local-level advocacy yields the highest impact

Data collected from Albany Promise and P16 in particular strongly suggest that local-level advocacy is the most ideal for Strive networks pursuing systems change in education with a specific geographic and community focus. As mentioned previously, P16 has had a number of successes changing policies within several school districts, and they attribute these successes largely to their strategic use of data. Our P16 interview emphasizes remaining nonpartisan while engaging in advocacy activities at the local level, and identifying issues within which the partnership has significant relationships and leverage.

The Albany Promise perspective is similar; the staff member we interviewed believes advocacy is simply most feasible and effective at the local level as that is where the coalition has its strong data base; they can confidently say which programs are having which outcomes at the school districts where they have frontline partner organization members. They, too, have had a number of successes within school districts in the Albany area.

Data from Dallas Commit! also echoes these findings; Libby McCabe indicates that they have the most impact working on advocacy within their established networks at the local

level. Raise DC! also mentioned successes at the city and school board level. The correlation in these findings across four partnerships suggests that this may be an appropriate area for Generation Next to engage in advocacy efforts.

The role and position of the backbone organization

Some of our case studies shed significant light on backbone operations with respect to advocacy and the ways in which the backbone organization itself can best facilitate those activities. Data from our Raise DC! case study in particular indicates that their backbone organization's focus is on relationship building and strategic identification of key actors to champion specific advocacy efforts. They create and support the "change networks," and collect and disseminate data to prove impact and improve practice.

The backbone staff at Dallas Commit! see themselves most importantly as a convener, continuously keeping stakeholders in the loop and educating the community and leadership on the priorities and significance in their advocacy strategies. Their role in the process includes vetting issues for advocacy and then bringing them to their governing board, publishing "action alerts" and updating the formal advocacy agenda. They play a central role in connecting each of the pieces and actors involved in the process. Similarly, our P16 case study revealed that their focus is on this educational piece; they keep leadership continuously and completely informed of the experiences of frontline practitioners and the data being collected and analyzed so as to ensure all actors involved in the advocacy process are cohesively representing the same vision and perspective.

Generation Next Staff Perceptions & Roles

Analysis of individual interviews conducted with the staff of Generation Next revealed areas of overlap in their perceptions of advocacy as it relates to the organization. Staff members shared similar thoughts in their definitions of advocacy, perception of Generation Next's purpose in pursuing advocacy, and opinions on the necessary components for advocacy such as buy-in from coalition members, rigorous data, and the importance of implementers and front line workers in informing the issues for which the coalition advocates. Diverging viewpoints existed around the issues of what the future makeup of the leadership council ought to be, whether or not full consensus of the leadership council is necessary for individual issues the coalition advocates for, if Generation Next currently has the appropriate internal staff to develop and implement advocacy efforts, and the implications of using data as a tool for advocacy.

Clarity around purpose and definition of advocacy

All staff members were asked how they define advocacy for Generation Next, and the overwhelming response was that advocacy means having “a point of view” on issues related to education and closing the achievement gap. One staff member put this definition into perspective, “I would say with almost 40 people at our leadership table, of all of those different sectors, we should have a point of view on things. And so when I think about advocacy, it's how do we lend our voice to issues that matter? Because we have an informed perspective and have a role to play in the implementation or articulation of that.” The other staff members agreed with viewpoint and also emphasized the different ways in which advocacy can be implemented: at the federal, state, or local level, “officially” through lobbying or testifying, or in more subtle ways such as media advocacy and publishing blog posts or newsletters. There was also clarity among staff that Generation Next's ultimate purpose in pursuing advocacy is to achieve systemic change for St. Paul and Minneapolis public schools. In summing up this purpose, one staff member stated, “We talk a lot about going back to our mission again. If we are going to fix the issues around the achievement gap, especially for students of color, we have to fix systemic issues. There are a lot of things you can do to fix systemic issues, but we constantly run into official rules or a policy or laws, which those little fixes will not get over.”

Clarity around leadership council support, divergence around the nature of that support

There was agreement among staff members that the leadership council needs to buy into the overall notion of Generation Next engaging in advocacy efforts. Staff conveyed that, at the very least, Generation Next needs to get some form of initial approval from the leadership council to develop and implement its advocacy work.

There was an overall lack of consensus among staff, however, on the necessity of *every* leadership council member's approval for general involvement in advocacy or the necessity of the leadership council's approval of specific issues for which Generation Next will advocate. One staff member stated that full consensus of the leadership council was necessary, while another stated that it might not be realistic to expect everyone in the council to agree and suggested an “opt-in, opt-out” system be established.

Divergence around leadership council structural changes

Staff members also differed in their perceptions of how the structure of the leadership council might change should the coalition engaged in advocacy. One staff member stated that Generation Next's biggest risk in pursuing advocacy efforts was the potential of losing leadership council members, while another staff member exclaimed, "...it may be the best thing for us if, when all the dust settles, we don't have a 40-person board. Now if the wrong people leave, if the really important people leave, then we have a problem." It was also suggested that the right, or necessary, people might not even be at the leadership council "table" right now.

Clarity around the importance of data

The importance of data in supporting Generation Next's advocacy work was also heavily discussed, and all staff members conveyed that the coalition holds a unique position in the education field due to its informed perspective through data. From this perspective also comes Generation Next's ability to "bring data to a conversation, help people understand that, and help people solve [issues] in a more tangible way." One staff member stated that, right now, data doesn't play a big enough role in policymaking and that elected officials don't actually make decisions based on data, but other staff responses suggest that therein lies an opportunity for Generation Next to be a player in advocacy. While staff agreed that Generation Next's capacity to collect, interpret, and disseminate data would serve as a strength in the coalition's advocacy efforts, there was a slight divergence in staff viewpoints surrounding the true objectivity of data. It was suggested that Generation Next's data proficiency will allow the coalition to be objective in its advocacy efforts, but concern was also raised around the fact that once the data is publicized in a political environment, there is no way to ensure that it will not be used for partisan purposes.

Clarity around the local level being the best venue for advocacy efforts

Staff agreed that the best venue for Generation Next to affect systems change is at the local level--the county, city, and school districts. One staff member effectively sums this up: "I think that the most influential advocacy we could do is actually at the local level, at the city and district and at the county. Because those are the people we would work with internally very closely, so we get to work with their staff and see the kinds of things that change or don't change and why. And for the most part I actually think there's a vacuum of advocacy in that area." Most staff members also suggested the important role of front line workers within Generation Next partner organizations in informing advocacy work. One staff member suggested it would be particularly beneficial if individuals with more experience in St. Paul and Minneapolis schools were informing Generation Next's advocacy work.

Divergence around current staff capacity for advocacy work

Lastly, staff diverged in their perceptions of internal staff capacity to take on an advocacy role. One staff member felt confident in current staff members' expertise and "perspectives and understandings" as being enough to begin the coalition's advocacy work. On the other hand, one staff member stated a need for some type of change: "I think if we're going to do advocacy right, we need to rethink how we are staffed, and I don't know if that means bringing more people in or bringing different people in. Or do they have the right expertise to do it? We couldn't do this tomorrow even if we had the best plan out there, so I think just staffing makes a difference." Other staff conveyed a feeling of being stretched too

thin. These are important considerations for assessing Generation Next's current internal capacity.

Final Conclusions

Across our three areas of study, literature reviews, case studies and staff interviews, we discovered several points of consensus:

Advocacy is required for systems change.

- Systems change requires altering the way decisions are made about community-wide policies, programs and resource allocation. Advocacy is the most effective way of influencing these decisions.
- Collective impact coalitions are uniquely positioned to engage in advocacy because they: 1) have access to data and the expertise to interpret that data and 2) consist of a variety of actors with a comprehensive array of knowledge and network connections.
 - Daniel Sellers also mentions that many of the activities Strive partnerships are naturally engaged in are, in fact, forms of advocacy already.

Effective advocacy begins with a shared purpose and a common understanding of advocacy.

- Backbone staff, board and leadership council members need clarity of purpose before pursuing advocacy. Questions such as, “Why is advocacy important for systems change? Why is advocacy important for Generation Next?” must be addressed.
- These same parties must also share an understanding about the “how” and “what.”
 - How does advocacy accomplish our goals?
 - How do we, the staff and leadership council, decide which policy items to pursue? What issues do we lend our voice to?
 - For the leadership council in particular, what does that decision making process look like? Do we vote on the issues or do we opt in/opt out?
 - How should we, individually and collectively, engage in advocacy? What advocacy activities are we best positioned to pursue?
 - How can we be effective at the local, city and state levels?

Successful advocacy efforts are built from the bottom up.

- Issues bubble up from the frontlines.
- The community does not simply participate, but rather they are *engaged*.
 - Advocacy efforts are most impactful when the community plays an active role in developing and implementing advocacy efforts.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Daniel Sellers also expressed the significance of grassroots support and involvement in advocacy efforts; EdAllies partners with organizations closest to the families and communities involved in the issue to identify how those community voices and experiences can be elevated and expressed in a way that compels practitioners and leaders to get on board with the policy, program, or practice they’re advocating for.

- Many collective impact coalitions recruit ongoing action networks comprised of practitioners and content experts that identify the issues to be affected through advocacy.

Data play a crucial role in the creation and implementation of advocacy efforts.

- Rigorous collection and interpretation of data acts as a flashlight to illuminate the issues that are most able to produce systems change.
 - The traditional approach of signing onto advocacy without looking at the data and questioning what works is no longer effective.
- Using and disseminating data strategically is key for building credibility as well as gaining the attention and support of influential actors.
 - By equipping the staff, leadership council and community members with data, you can empower them to communicate with others, and particularly elected officials, in a more effective manner.
 - Disseminating data through media outlets can be a particularly potent form of advocacy. It allows an organization to serve as an “expert” on a set of issues and brings a sense of urgency to an issue that might have lost some attention-- both of these advantages play a role in mobilizing support for an advocacy issue among the public and elected officials.

The backbone staff of a collective impact initiative is best poised to act as an educator, convener, facilitator and filter.

- Expertise within the backbone staff is represented in three areas: technical knowledge of specific issue areas, a deep understanding of the policymaking process and political environment, and the ability to interpret and disseminate data in a way that is accessible to the public.
- In the process of deciding how issues become part of a coalition’s advocacy efforts, the backbone staff, rather than bringing up the advocacy issues themselves, serves as a filter and sifts through the issues brought up from action networks on the frontlines. The backbone staff determines the feasibility of pursuing the issue through advocacy and takes scope of the support they have within the coalition for the issue itself.
 - As interpreters of data, the backbone staff also plays a critical role in educating the leadership council and coalition members on these issues.

Advocacy initiatives within coalitions can have the most success at the local level.

- For collective impact coalitions, advocacy at the county, city, and school district levels has great potential for systems change because it allows for more manageable, yet rigorous data collection and interpretation.
- At the local level, relationships between coalition members and other local actors such as elected officials or public agencies not represented on the coalition are likely already established. This makes for an environment that is well-suited for advocacy.

The advocacy activities and strategies best suited for coalitions happen at the grassroots level.

- Because advocacy issues bubble up from the frontlines where practitioners and content experts witness problems first hand, engaging those actors, as well as the people who are actually experiencing the problem, can be a powerful way of advocating for change. When citizens use their voice to raise issues, elected officials are more inclined to address them.
- Asking for public action can come in the form of letter writing and phone calls to elected officials and testimonies, to name a few. It is also not uncommon for coalitions to engage leadership in the processes of letter writing and phone calls to legislators.

Recommendations

Given the above conclusions from the research, we provide the following recommendations, in priority order, for Generation Next to consider as they pursue advocacy.

1. Build leadership council understanding of and support for involvement in advocacy

In order for a coalition's advocacy work to be successful, it must have support from the leadership council. This support does not entail gaining approval for each individual advocacy issue, but rather gaining approval for the coalition's general involvement in advocacy. Our research suggests that this process will require the presentation of evidence for the necessity of advocacy for Generation Next at every opportunity. The following should be prioritized in these meetings:

- Educate the leadership council on what advocacy means (including effective advocacy strategies) and the importance of advocacy in achieving real systems change
- Recount successes of other Strive partners who are engaging in advocacy
- Educate the council on the process by which issues to advocate for will be established and implemented (once the process is established; we detail our recommendations for this process below).
- Discuss specific current issues in the work that would benefit from advocacy efforts, with data to support this discussion

This will ensure that your strategies and advocacy efforts are continuously enhanced by uniting and supporting the leaders that champion or participate in policy/program advocacy efforts. The council is more likely to be persuaded once they are aware that their approval and participation isn't required for each specific issue.

2. Establish a common purpose for advocacy among staff and the leadership council

Data from our staff interviews, as described previously, suggests that there is in fact a common understanding of the purpose of engaging advocacy for Generation Next among its staff members. However, the shared purpose has not been discussed and made known collectively within the organization and broader coalition. Research from our literature reviews in particular demonstrate that creating and knowing a shared purpose is important in successfully implementing a significant facet of work such as advocacy.

3. Establish sustaining action networks

It was conveyed to us in conversations with Generation Next staff members that the coalition has experience convening groups similar to action networks, however staff explained that these were not permanent components to the coalition's structure. We are recommending that more formal action networks be created around Generation Next's six goal areas. Our research suggests that these groups have been most effective for other Strive

partnerships' advocacy efforts. As described previously, these groups are most often comprised of practitioners and content experts from partner organizations who are most committed and involved in the specific issue or goal area (early childhood education, graduation and college readiness, etc). We also recommend that there is adaptability in the structure of these action networks that allows for the creation of sub-networks based on the policy issues arising and resolving in the political landscape.

4. Implement a process for identifying issues and engaging in advocacy efforts

The following process is illustrative of the kinds of sequenced steps Generation Next could take to identify advocacy issues and gain widespread commitment:

- Issues are brought to Generation Next through the action networks as the issues present themselves in the work.
 - Frequent, two-way communication between these action networks and Generation Next staff should occur to ensure that these issues are conveyed regularly and effectively.
- The Generation Next staff filters and vets each issue according to the following criteria, at minimum:
 - Is there data to support the policy or program's effectiveness in solving the issue or barrier at hand?
 - Is the policy or program likely to gain widespread support?
 - Is the policy or program feasible for Generation Next to advocate for given the nature of the policy, the partners that Generation Next works with, and the leaders on its council?
 - We suggest an "Issues Mapping" exercise to aid in the vetting process as shown in *Appendix 8*. The purpose of this exercise is to help identify the issues that have common support on the leadership council, and it will also aid in the process of presenting and framing issues to the council.
- The policy or program is presented to the leadership council and is framed in a way that does not ask for approval, but rather asks which council members are most involved in the issue area and are best poised to support its advocacy and implementation, and what those members specifically can do. It is also advised that those closest to the issue with the most social capital in that area are approached directly. Additionally, the question should be presented to the council of if there are any members who would like to opt out of being associated in any way with support for or against that policy or program. This aspect of the process will be particularly important and should be made extremely clear in dealing with more controversial issues if Generation Next decides to pursue any. (Note: again, this is where the data and the presentation of the issue are key! The issue will have been vetted extensively for feasibility and range of support, and this will need to be communicated to the council in an effective way). Daniel Sellers recommended creating "cover" when soliciting support for controversial issues; in some ways finding compelling points to present that demonstrate the necessity for the organization to

advocate for the issue, the protections or justifications it has for doing so, and the potential dangers or consequences if they do not.

- Generation Next staff explore and implement the most appropriate form(s) and area(s) of advocacy for the policy or program at hand given all of the internal and external factors (position of the leaders who will champion the issue, extent to which Generation Next has established relationships with partners who have leverage in the issue area, nature of the policy or program itself, etc). Our research suggests that Generation Next is well-poised to begin the advocacy process at the local level, and if the above recommendations are implemented, grassroots advocacy would be an appropriate area to initiate advocacy efforts.

A visual representation of this process is shown below



Note: You will notice that the arrows are bi-directional. This is to represent that the flow of communication is not always a linear process. For example, Generation Next staff arrows point back to the action networks because we recognize that the staff's filtering and vetting process will require frequent, two-way communication with the action networks; issues will have complexities and complications that will require re-strategizing and rethinking the problem and the advocacy issue at hand.

5. Establish a routinized process by which data are disseminated effectively for advocacy and continuous improvement

Based on our research, this should be a continuous, systematized process. Generation Next should prioritize efforts to convene and educate the leadership council, community members and partner organizations as to the findings and implications of the data and analysis. Disseminating the data effectively will reinforce the necessary leadership council's support for advocacy efforts as they are continuously made aware of the barriers to closing the achievement gap and the solutions proven to be effective. It will also engage the community in the partnership's advocacy efforts and facilitate ongoing grassroots action and support for advocacy.

Additionally, data should be used to support the implementation of the policies and programs that Generation Next advocates for or against, after policies pass or programs are approved. Generation Next should serve as a resource for improving those programs and practices and ensuring that they produce the intended outcomes. This is largely supported by the Raise D.C.! Case study and by Daniel Sellers' interview, both of which made clear that success in advocacy is not when a program is approved or a piece of legislation is passed, but when the *barrier is removed* and the system is changed to improve outcomes in education.

6. Dedicate additional resources to Generation Next's advocacy work

Examples of additional internal resources include full-time staff with expertise in local policy or a graduate level administrative intern. Generation Next could also recruit resources external to the backbone organization, such as an advocacy council comprised of individuals from partner organizations and/or leaders or experts in education advocacy in the Twin Cities.

7. Continuously explore the social and organizational networks and connections that exist in the Twin Cities' education policy field

Our research suggests that the relationships in the policy field are extremely significant to navigating political issues and gaining support and momentum for policies and programs. We therefore recommend designating time and resources specifically to the continuous exploration of the relationships and connections between actors and stakeholders around current issues being discussed by the action networks, and how those relationships can be leveraged in Generation Next's advocacy strategies.

Considerations for Future Research

A key area for further study includes examining more of the Strive Partners as a way to better understand how to approach advocacy as well as the challenges and opportunities these entities face when advocacy is their primary work.

The following important questions arose from our research, which would be helpful for Generation Next to consider as they move forward in strategizing around advocacy:

1. Would actively advocating for specific policy issues result in reducing or eliminating the academic achievement gap in Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools, specifically?
2. Does simply having a strong coalition with a shared understanding around measurement, evaluation and overall outcomes, coupled with targeted strategies supported by the backbone and practitioners alone, promote significant improvements?
3. And, are there policy field levers which could, when tapped in conjunction with these activities, accelerate or enhance the current efforts put forth by Generation Next?
4. Would a combination of approaches, involving policy level and local practice, increase the ability of the coalition to realize its goals more quickly?

Concluding Remarks

As a multi-sector convener that includes school district and city-level officials, as well as corporations, major funders and nonprofit leaders on its leadership council, it is important to understand and navigate the political dynamics carefully when considering policy solutions. Generation Next staff must be prepared to approach advocacy and policy development with a flexible set of strategies. By formally engaging action networks, Generation Next can cultivate a wide array of partners to ensure success on issues and topics it values.

Finally, as is clear in the research, advocacy work is required for systems change. We have provided a set of recommendations to unpack some of the complexities associated with advocacy, paying particular attention to grassroots engagement, the role of Generation Next and the nature of the leadership council's involvement. We hope this information is useful as you consider your future advocacy strategy.

Appendices

Appendix 1. StriveTogether Members - Excel Spreadsheet

See next pages for the spreadsheets

Attributes of StriveTogether Members

Organization	City	State	Leadership Structure	Backbone and Operations Team	Status	Community Partners / Action Networks	Comments
Stamford Cradle to Career	Stamford	Connecticut	Members representing all components of the accountability structure from government, businesses, universities, CBOs/non-profits and philanthropies who serve as advisors to the partnership.	3 Staff responsible for day-to-day operational support.	Emerging	Over 98 Community partners and growing	Has and executive team in addition to the Leadership Council. Has redefined the collective impact and how it works as of 2016
Treasures Valley Education Partnership	Boise	Idaho	"core leadership team" of 25	only 3 staff including ED	Sustaining	Partners include early educators, local school districts, post-secondary institutions, nonprofit organizations, government entities, foundations and businesses.	
Destination Education	Holland/Zeeland	Michigan	11 cross sector members	2 staff: executive director and partnership network facilitator	Emerging		
Kconnect	Grand Rapids	Michigan	12 cross sector members, very few corporations	3 staff: executive director, facilitator of collective impact efforts, process facilitator	Emerging		
Partnership for Children	San Diego	California	13 council members (only one from nonprofit)	4 staff	Emerging	37 partners	
Boston Opportunity Agenda	Boston	Massachusetts	13 cross sector members	Not listed	Sustaining	Over 150 cross-sector members	
E3 Alliance	Austin	Texas	13-member Board of Directors	16 staff	Sustaining	Nearly 100 Partners; over half are school districts and charter schools, the rest are cross-sector, 40 funders	
Higher Expectations	Racine	Wisconsin	14-member leadership table	6 staff	Sustaining	20 listed partners	
Norwalk ACTS	Norwalk	Connecticut	15 Advisory Board Members as Executive Leadership;	6 Staff members, Stepping stones Museum for Children is the anchor Entity	Emerging	Over 100 Community Partners - In 2009 the strategic plan was developed by Mayor School Superintendent, Exec Dir of Norwalk Children's Foundation, NAACP Chair, Early Childhood Council Chair, President of Teachers Union & President of Norwalk Community College	All members sign a Memorandum of Agreement that holds Norwalk ACTS and its Members accountable for a dynamic civic infrastructure that aligns individual and collective action with advocacy and financial investment to strengthen educational, social/ emotional, and physical health support systems through the achievement of six high level outcomes
Bold Goals Coalition	Birmingham	Alabama	15 council members- lots of corporations, no nonprofit	9. Looks like they are also part of United Way and supervised by a SVP of community impact at United Way	Sustaining	230+ cross sector partners	
Bridging Richmond	Richmond	Virginia	15-member leadership council	3 staff	Sustaining	30 cross-sector partners	
The Road Map Project	South King County / South Seattle	Washington	15-member project "sponsor" team in addition to a 5-member BOD	12 staff	Sustaining	200+ cross-sector partners	They have an Advocacy team!!!!
Better Together	Redmond	Oregon	16 Board Members	5 Staff: Director, Project Manager and 3 AmeriCorps Members	Emerging		
Eastside Pathways	Bellevue	Washington	17-member BOD	7 staff (4 of which are volunteer)	Sustaining	63 cross-sector partners	
Cradle to Career Sonoma County	Sonoma County	California	18 Cross Sector members deemed Operations Team	2 Staff, but this could be understated as website may not have all	Emerging	over 50 Community partners and growing	Encourage partnerships thru a take action pledge on the website
The Albany Promise	Albany	New York	18 member Leadership Council	3-staff listed on the webpage; interim director, community engagement manager, and a facilitator; Data Team comprised of staff led by Center for Human Services Research; 4-Action team co-chairs: multiple SMEs (21 listed) who look part-time-ish or to be contributing and have interesting connections (i.e. Jeff Edmondson is one of them)	Sustaining	Individual Investors, corporate investors and foundation investors; education, business, community, higher ed, civic, and philanthropy work as they commit to working in partnership on the frontlines	University of Alabama is the anchor entity (much like United Way is to GenNEXT). There is a recognition that because this great coalition has formed, it is simply not enough, hence, Superman isn't coming tag line. Albany is doing advocacy work as they commit to working in partnership on the frontlines
Spartanburg Academic Movement	Spartanburg	South Carolina	19 Board Members / LC	6 key staff : Data Lead that coordinates work with six school districts	Sustaining	They have a "partner roundtable" includes school districts and community based orgs, corporations, nonprofits, faith-based.	Executive Director of backbone is a former chancellor from the University of South Carolina .
Baltimore Promise	Baltimore	Maryland	19 cross sector members, very few corporations and nonprofit orgs	3 staff members: executive director, director of data analysis, communications and community engagement specialist	Emerging		
Every Hand Joined	Red Wing	Minnesota	19 mostly private and public members	Unclear, maybe just one executive director?	Sustaining	27 cross-sector members	
Summit Education Initiative	Summit County	Ohio	21 Board Members	7 Staff	Emerging		Board Responsibilities Publicly visible on the website: Hire, support, and evaluate the Executive Director Establish governing policies Execute fiduciary responsibilities Ensure development and execution of strategic plans Support and assist with fundraising
Bridge to Success Community Partnership	Waterbury	Connecticut	21 community council members - no corporate or business members	not listed	Sustaining	almost 100 partners	

Attributes of StriveTogether Members

Organization	City	State	Leadership Structure	Backbone and Operations Team	Status	Community Partners / Action Networks	Comments
Austin Aspires	Austin	Minnesota	21 cross-sector members	Backbone is difficult to decipher from web presence	Emerging	Education, Business and Community partners - local to Austin area	Looks to be newly forming and as though it runs very lean in terms of operations. Action teams appear to be the main mode of moving the work.
Cradle to Career Alliance Columbia, MO	Columbia	Missouri	22 member board representing multiple interest areas; 11 Founding Board Members of which 8 remain active	under construction	Emerging	higher ed, banking & commerce, community college and higher ed,	Dashboard; Equity Statement; Broad Outcomes aligned to Gen NEXT
Northfield Promise	Northfield	Minnesota	22 Members representing many local players - Council of Champions	23 person Steering Committee; in addition, created action teams made up of diverse players for each outcome area - K readiness action team; Reading action Team, College preparedness action team; Data Team, etc.	Sustaining	Carleton, St. Olaf, Transportation, Public Schools, Healthcare, Local Technology firm	Northfield was awarded a Tableau Foundation Grant through the Strive Network to begin the Collective Impact Data work; Very aligned to closing gaps. K readiness, and improving graduation outcomes
P16 Plus Council of Greater Bexar County	Bexar County	Texas	22-member BOD	9 staff	Sustaining	Does not list out partners	
Graduate! Tacoma Tacoma, WA	Washington	Washington	22-member BOD	10 staff	Sustaining	200+ cross-sector partners	
RGV Focus	Rio Grande Valley	Texas	24-member leadership council	5 staff	Emerging	37 school districts; 4 colleges/universities; 5 funders; 6 "community" partners	
Step Forward	Shreveport	Louisiana	25 members from all sectors, very few corporations; 6 person executive team	Not listed	Emerging		
Bridgeport Prosper	Bridgeport	Connecticut	27 "core leadership team members" including 3 chairs	only 2 UW staff dedicated to the backbone strive org: an ED & an Early Childhood Project Manager	Emerging	not explicitly listed or mentioned- perhaps just staff from leadership team member orgs	
Achieve Brown County	Green Bay	Wisconsin	28-member leadership council and 8-member executive team	4 staff	Sustaining	Partners not listed	
Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative	Charleston	South Carolina	3 Officers; 16 Members on Board of Directors and huge Community Leadership Council (100+)	3 Staff	Sustaining		Community Engagement, Cultural Competence, Equity - Core Values reflect gen next
StrivePartnership	Newport & Covington	Kentucky	30 plus members from all sectors, very few corporations	8 staff members	Proof Point	More than 300 cross-sector representatives joined the partnership including school district superintendents, early-childhood educators, non-profit practitioners, business leaders, community and corporate funders, city officials, and university presidents.	
ImpactTulsa	Tulsa	Oklahoma	31 Members of LC	5 key staff	Sustaining	4 - Key investors and 15 partner school districts	This Strive Network has built into its structure what they call an Operations Network made up of action teams that develop and execute plans. This was an interesting meeting in May 2016 on education budget crisis: https://youtu.be/g-dhqmUBMw
Thrive Chicago	Chicago	Illinois	32 members from public, private, and nonprofit sectors, but few corporate members	7 staff members: president and chief impact officer, chief strategy officer, director of operations, manager or high school graduation initiatives, manager of workforce initiatives, manager of college completion initiatives, project manager of 100K opportunities initiatives	Emerging	Almost 200; colleges and universities, nonprofit providers, research and advocacy organizations, museums and cultural institutions, education systems and industry and philanthropic partners	Members commit to a decision-making process and this is posted on the website. Majority rules consensus process. Unique structure of Leadership, executive, accountability and advisory teams: http://www.lisd.us/enawee-cradle-to-career-2/student-success-networks/
Lenawee Cradle to Career	Lenawee County	Michigan	32 members representing multiple sectors	6-Staff called Executive Committee appear to make up the backbone of this C2C.	Emerging	50+ Education, Business and Community Partners	Raise DC is primarily focused on the advocacy aspect of work within the coalition. Cultivates and deep bench of partners to make the most of policy window as opportunities arise.
RaiseDC	Washington DC	Washington	32-member leadership council	7 full-time / 2 Advocates as operations Team DC AYA Alliance for Youth Advocates	Sustaining	150+ Community Partners including Advocacy Orgs	
Marin Promise	Marin County	California	33 council members	5 staff	Sustaining	~30 partners	"Partnership council" has specific policy committee
StrivePartnership	Cincinnati	Ohio	34 members from all sectors, very few corporations	8 staff members	Proof Point	More than 300 cross-sector representatives joined the partnership, including school district superintendents, early-childhood educators, non-profit practitioners, business leaders, community and corporate funders, city officials, and university presidents.	
Thriving Together	Phoenix	Arizona	36 cross sector members	4 staff	Sustaining	78 cross sector partners including teach for america, AZ charter school association, various faith agencies	"Collaborative action teams", but no explicit mention of advocacy on website

Attributes of StriveTogether Members

Organization	City	State	Leadership Structure	Backbone and Operations Team	Status	Community Partners / Action Networks	Comments
90% by 2020: Anchorage United for Youth	Anchorage	Alaska	37 council members - from each sector	5 staff, also part of united way	Sustaining	Not listed. Looks like active partners are the leadership council member orgs (like GN)	***Network Strategies*** include "Policy/Advocacy and Communications"; The network will identify and prioritize key policy and advocacy recommendations for 2015/16. They will also work with the Community Will Building Committee to create a communications campaign related to the network goals to increase math proficiency.
Fresno Cradle to Career	Fresno County	California	37 members across nine sectors	3.5 Staff who lead communications, continuous improvement processes and data	Emerging	Outcome Partners include 8 Key committees or Action Networks who meet and are leading work in key areas	In 2016, received 710,000 Grant from The James Irvine Foundation
Cradle to Career Partnership	Tucson	Arizona	38 cross-sector members	6 staff including one dedicated Change Network Facilitator	Emerging	Partners include early educators, local school districts, post-secondary institutions, nonprofit organizations, government entities, foundations and businesses.	Partnerships are categorized: Valedictorian, Deans list, Honor roll, Council, PTA, Friend. Currently working re-engagement opportunity for youth
Generation Next	Minneapolis & St. Paul	Minnesota	38 cross-sector members	5 staff: executive director, managing director and director of data and research, director of networks and education policy, director of outreach and partnerships, project manager	Sustaining	Really, really big hahal	Equity is a priority. Board of Directors provides direction and oversight to a Steering Committee of approximately 15 members
All Hands Raised	Multnomah County	Oregon	39 Members of the LC: Executive Board Members - 24; Legal representation & a CEO 40 members from early childhood learning, education, adult workforce/education, business, philanthropy, economic development, public sector, nonprofit/social services/faith	14 Staff	Sustaining	Partners with six districts and six foundations\	
Big Goal Collaborative	North East	Indiana	44-member leadership council and 17-member executive council	regional economic development organization, no individualized backbone organization--all are part of larger NE regional partnership	Sustaining	group of regional educators, community partners, businesspeople, civic leaders, and other people passionate about educational attainment	
Milwaukee Succeeds	Milwaukee	Wisconsin		9 staff + 5 AmeriCorps staff	Sustaining	Partners not listed	*Council members have specific designated responsibilities including Actively promote ACYI programs and services among the community, ACYI constituencies, and within your own organization. & Actively make programmatic, political, and funding connections on behalf of ACYI.
Adams County Youth Initiative	Adams County	Colorado	48 council members	3 staff	Sustaining	47 partners	Advocacy is listed as a benefit to partners on their website
Mission: Graduate	Albuquerque	New Mexico	5 Collaborative Action Network Leaders; 14 Strategy Leaders; 1 Executive Assistant	13 Staff	Sustaining	150+ Community Partners including Advocacy Orgs	
Promise Partnership	Salt Lake City	Utah	50-member UnitedWay BOD	80 staff (staff is not separate from UnitedWay staff)	Emerging	67 cross-sector partners	
The Commit! Partnership	Dallas	Texas	79-Member leadership council	23 Staff; 4 Interns: 10 previous interns & fellows	Sustaining	180 cross-sector partners	
Westbrook Children's Project	Westbrook	Maine	9 cross sector members	1 staff member, project manager	Emerging	46 cross-sector partners	
The Learning Network	Kalamazoo	Michigan	9 members, no corporations	4 staff: executive director, assistant, facilitator, communications manager	Sustaining	Not listed	
Learn to Earn Dayton	Montgomery County,	Ohio	Board of Trustees - 24 representing community and commerce interests; 19-Member Advisory Board primarily made up of education expertise- early childhood, human services, county and private child centered services	9 staff	Sustaining	13 area funders including county and local foundations; fordham institute	
Excellerate Success	Spokane County	Washington	does not mention a leadership council or BOD	4 staff	Emerging	45 cross-sector partners	
ROC the Future	Rochester	New York	Executive Committee comprised of 5 Key Strategic Partners; 43 Convenors representing many entities and areas of interest	2 Primary Staff; There are three key committees which include Fundraising, a Report Card Committee and Data Taskforce Committees; members are from the 43 convenor list and represent broad range of interests	Sustaining	United Way, Local Foundation, Public Library, Bonadio Group, Childrens Agenda	Their structure includes a Governance Committee of 6, 3 strategies defined related to K readiness, high school graduation and post-secondary opportunities (Reddy Freddy, Mentoring and 5-steps to world of opportunities)
The Forsyth Promise	Winston-Salem	North Carolina	Executive Team comprised of 4 Officers and 19 Members - Community Leadership Council (lists 23 members)	4- operations team members who are part of Executive team	Sustaining	4 Primary Investors; including United Way; Lots of community partners	Organized as a network of expanding circles. At center are children and youth; surrounded by education, parents and program providers and this is considered the core learning zone
Bright Futures for Monterey County	Monterey	California	Leaders Forum which represents Business, Education & Government. Service Organizations / Core Convenors: 5 Lead sponsors / Primary Governance includes 15 executive board members	3 Staff listed: Director, Community Engagement Coordinator, Senior Data Analyst - Continuous Improvement Specialist	Emerging	Comprised of Anchor organizations, Steering Partners, Leaders Forum and Community Members	
Seeding Success Memphis, TN	Memphis	Tennessee	No leadership listed	6 staff	Emerging	64 cross-sector partners	

Attributes of StriveTogether Members

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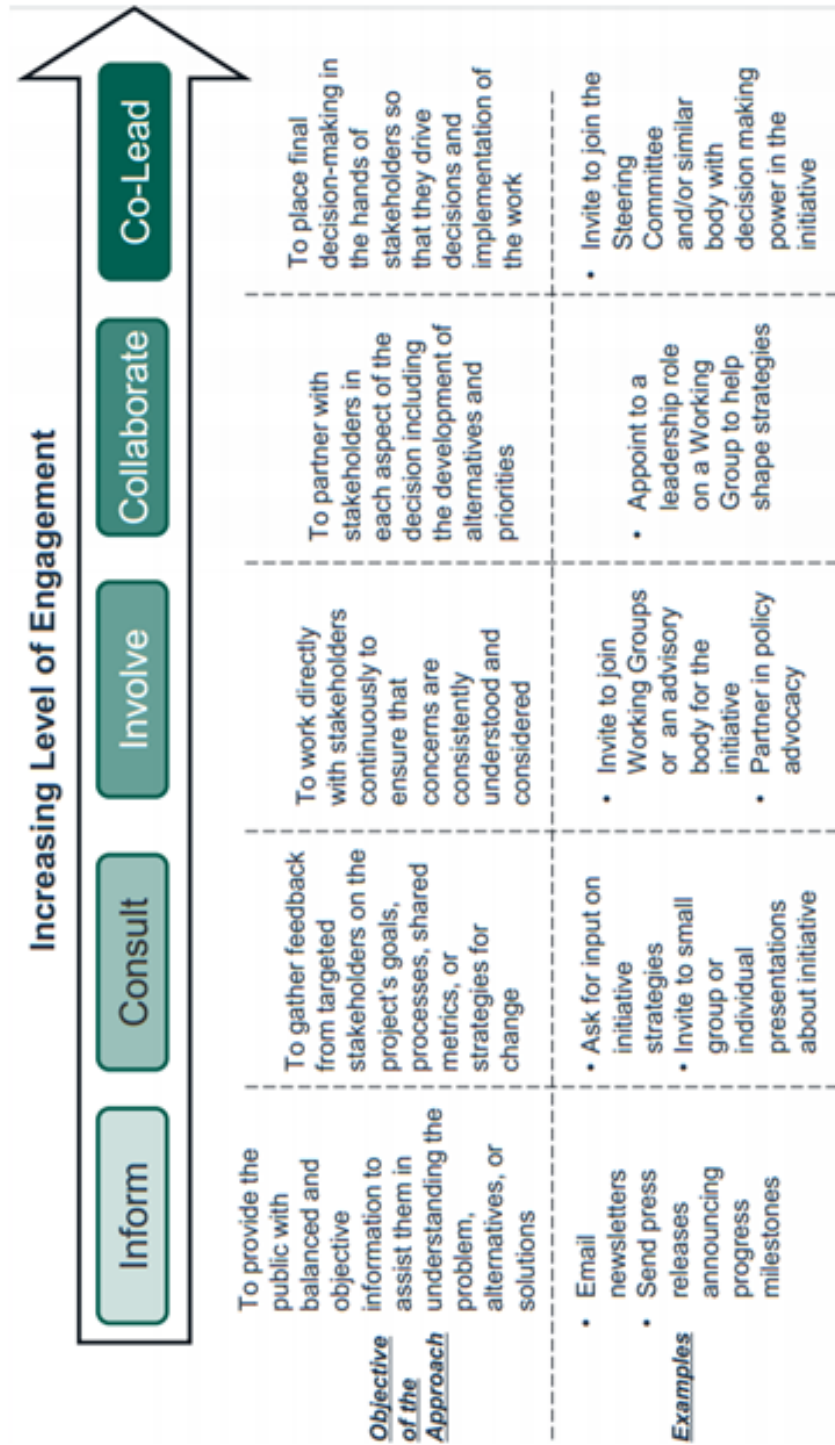
Appendix 2. StriveTogether Site Interview Questions

1. How do you define advocacy as it relates to your organization?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of [Strive site] and the progression of your involvement in advocacy as a site that is currently in the “sustaining” gateway?
3. What is your strategy for advocacy?
 - Do you advocate at a state or local level?
 - What sort of policies do you advocate for?
 - What was most challenging about executing that strategy?
4. How did your network (leadership/staff/community) structure support your advocacy work? How do you get the leadership council and staff on the same page?
5. What were the essential components you needed to develop your advocacy agenda? (What did you absolutely have to have?)
6. Were you successful? If yes, how so? Today, would you do anything differently?
 - If no, what would you have done differently?
7. What kind of resources or direction have you received from the Strive national office to develop and implement an advocacy agenda?
8. Is there anything I didn’t ask that you think is important to include?

Appendix 3. Generation Next Staff Interview Questions

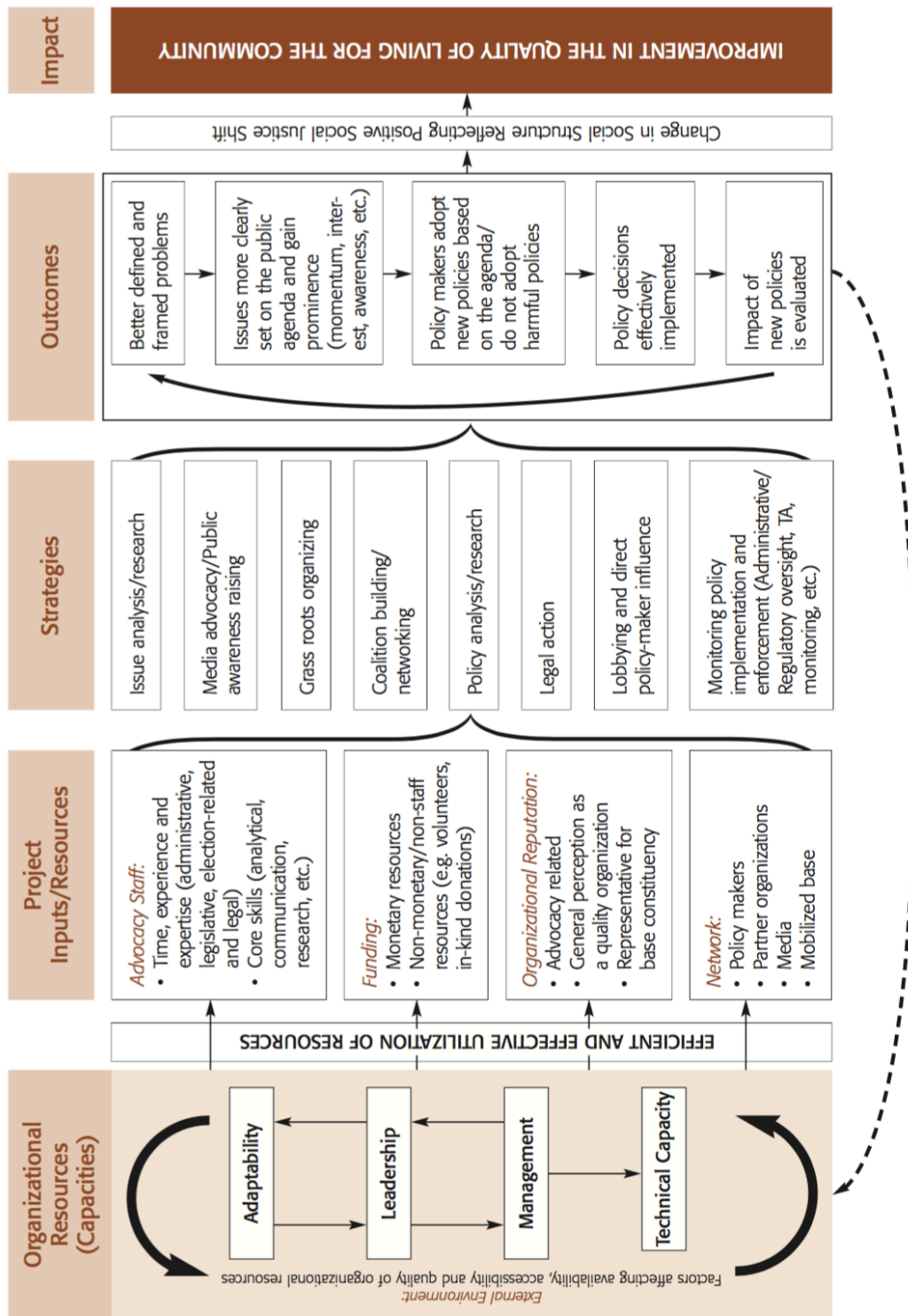
1. Can you briefly talk about your history/experience in the education field and what eventually brought you to GN?
2. Can you outline/briefly summarize your current major priorities as a new ED?
3. How would you define advocacy for Generation Next?
4. What do you see as Generation Next’s purpose in pursuing an advocacy agenda?
5. What do you think Generation Next would need to succeed in advocacy?
6. Where do you see opportunities within GN to pursue an advocacy agenda?
7. How do you envision your role in this advocacy agenda?
8. What do you see as the major internal and external barriers to pursuing an advocacy agenda?
9. What are the risks to pursuing an advocacy agenda for Generation Next/what are you most concerned about?
10. What current education-policy issues do you see as benefiting the most from an advocacy agenda?

Appendix 4. Collective Impact Forum Community Engagement Chart



Source: Collective Impact Forum, adapted from Tamarack Institute and IAP2

Appendix 5. Advocacy Logic Model



Appendix 6. Stand for Your Mission's Guide

“How to Start a Conversation Around Advocacy in the Boardroom

Step 1: A Shared Vision for the Future

Your organization was founded to meet a specific need or purpose and, as a part of that, is likely to have a vision of what the world would look like if that mission was achieved. Ask your board to answer the following questions:

- Is the board in agreement about our organization's vision for the future?
- How would the world be different if our mission was fully achieved?
- Are our current strategies the fastest or most direct path to achieving our vision? If not, what would be?

Step 2: A Deeper Understanding of Your Work

- All organizations are impacted by the larger environment and ecosystem in which they operate. Understanding what that ecosystem looks like for your organization, and where you are situated within it, is a critical step for your board. Ask your board the following questions:
 - What are the societal realities or problems that our work seeks to solve, alleviate, or otherwise address?
 - What are the broader issues associated with our core work?
 - Are our strategies actively addressing those issues? If not, what would change if they did?

Step 3: Identification of the Opportunities and Threats

Changes in your community, funding sources, and policy environment affect — either positively or negatively — your organization's ability to achieve its mission. Identifying and understanding the opportunities and threats affecting your organization is a key step in building an advocacy strategy and in ensuring that your board is well-positioned to help implement that strategy. Ask your board the following questions:

- What are some of the external factors that have positively or negatively impacted our work in the past? How well did we — as a board — anticipate them before they happened? Did we try to stop or soften the bad ones, or rally to support the good ones?
- Are there policy changes that would dramatically improve (or threaten) our ability to fulfill our mission and vision? If we could advance our mission more effectively by changing one law, public policy, or public attitude, what would that change be?
- Do we have candid conversations about the reliability of funding that we earn through government contracts or grants?

- Are we — as an organization — actively engaged in conversations with decision-makers about the policies or decisions that affect our work? If not, why not?

Step 4: Board Engagement in Making it Happen

Every board member brings a potent combination of passion and influence to his or her board service that — if leveraged — can powerfully accelerate your organization’s advocacy strategy. Understanding your board’s networks and spheres of influence can help you map the ways each board member can help. Ask your board the following questions:

- Do we regularly discuss the implications of public policies and funding to our mission?
- Do we have a public policy strategy for our organization, and — if so — is the board well-informed about how best to support it?
- Do we have board leaders who can speak to and connect with a broad cross-section of community needs and constituencies in support of our work?
- Have we provided training or guidance to board members about how to engage effectively in advocacy efforts that enables them to represent our mission and work with confidence?

Step 5: Making Advocacy a Part of Your Board’s Culture

A true cultural change happens when advocacy becomes fully integrated into the way that your board thinks, makes decisions, and measures its own success. Ask your board the following questions:

- Do we have goals for our advocacy work that enable us to assess how well we are doing across all the links and connections that are vital to our success?
- Is a degree of advocacy a part of every board member’s job description?
- Is our board recruitment strategy aligned with our public policy strategy, and the connections or influence that will ensure our success?
- Are we — as an organization — actively participating in coalitions and organizations that are helping to advance our advocacy strategy?”

Appendix 7. Full Strive Case Studies

Case Study 1: P16Plus of Greater Bexar County

Introduction

The first Strive site we researched and interviewed was the P16Plus Council of Greater Bexar County in San Antonio, Texas. P16 is internally comprised of nine staff members. Externally, P16 is a partnership across 35 nonprofits, 8 colleges and universities, and 15 (previously 16, hence the name P16) independent school districts. Foundations and corporations are clearly delineated as investors, and are not considered core members of the partnership.

Chaired by a member of the United Way Executive Committee, the partnership is governed by a 22-member P16Plus Board that contains representation from corporations, school districts (including five superintendents) and higher education institutions. Nonprofits and foundations are not included on this governing board. Additionally, the P16 staff organizes cross-sector support councils (or working committees) for each of their seven programs, who then set strategic priorities for these programs. Similarly, action networks are convened for each program to develop and execute those plans.

It was evident throughout our interview with P16's Executive Director, Judy McCormick, that advocacy occurs within each of their programs, and even beyond the boundaries of those programs if their partners feel strongly about pushing an agenda. In fact, McCormick said that P16's first step into the "sustaining phase" occurred when their action network partners started bringing policy to the table. The staff had been loosely involved in advocacy for several years, but there came a tipping point when action network members increasingly engaged in conversations around policy and encouraged the staff to become more deeply involved in policy. This encouraged P16 to adopt a more formalized and collective advocacy stance.

The Backbone

Though P16 does not engage in lobbying themselves, the staff recognizes their advocacy role as utilizing data and the experiences of their students, teachers and superintendents to better inform corporations and leaders who do have the capability to lobby. In doing so, P16's perspective is still accurately and widely represented. McCormick says, *"It is worth taking the time to thoroughly educate partners on pieces of legislation moving through the state and city House, as well as what messages we should be putting out into the community about those pieces of legislation. Legislation and indirect lobbying is new territory for a lot of our members because a lot of our partners are practitioners and direct service providers who may not be comfortable with that yet."*

Advocacy Strategies

Who is Involved

Among the policies that these action network partners regularly bring to the table, P16 staff identify the items most likely to move the big indicators and then create advocacy statements with board members around those agenda items. Then when a policy goes up for vote, these co-created advocacy statements are put to use in the form of written letters and testimonies that members of the staff, board and action networks disseminate into the public on behalf of P16. This has worked on numerous occasions, including the recent passing of a city policy that ensures a portion of the San Antonio sales tax will support free Pre-K and more Pre-K centers for economically disadvantaged children. Not only did the staff and board members actively engage in letter-writing and testifying to successfully move legislation, but now some of their board members and superintendents sit on the Board of Pre-K 4 San Antonio, which gives them even more leverage at the city level.

Where They Advocate

Looking at the varying levels of advocacy engagement, P16 focuses at the school district, city and state levels, but finds that they have the most impact at the district and city levels. In particular, they are most able to alter procedural processes at the district level and change funding priorities at the city level. Speaking more to the district level, P16 uses their ability to track and analyze data to alter policies within districts. For example, P16 was able to change suspension policies within six of their school districts, knowing that the other nine districts in the coalition would follow suit over time, by simply adopting an analytical perspective and using data strategically.

Advocacy Challenges

Furthermore, McCormick says many of the challenges surrounding advocacy can be resolved through simply explaining what advocacy is, what it looks like for the board, what is the collective vision of P16, and how they can make change at certain levels. A lot of the board members do not fully understand systems change to begin with, so there are important education pieces involved in the process. McCormick finds that taking advantage of these opportunities to educate the board often makes building consensus an agenda or issue that much easier. When the board feels more knowledgeable about an issue, they are more likely to get “on board”.

In addition, it helps that the policy items up for debate almost always come directly from P16 action network and work committee members because these partners are engaged in education issues at the ground level. So in a sense, the board has to take their word for it on certain issues because they have a perspective that no one else has. McCormick also mentions that often times the staff will step aside and let the action networks and work committees present the agenda items to the board themselves, to reduce any sort of suspicion that the backbone staff has a biased view. However, it is worth noting that the board uses a majority vote method to decide whether or not to move forward on an advocacy agenda. There are almost always dissenting votes, and some board members are unwilling to compromise, but few people actually leave the board. McCormick says that the few members who have left the board over the years simply didn’t align with the P16 vision, and that their departures did not harm P16 on any grand scale whatsoever.

When P16 staff use data to illuminate the specific barriers that, for instance, prevent students from graduating high school or getting into college, they are then able to objectively show Board members where their influence lies and how they, as a representative of their institution, can have the biggest impact. P16 staff also occasionally enlist the help of students themselves, and have them relay their firsthand experiences to the board about the barriers they face. Again, this is just another method the staff uses to say “Hey, these are the facts. What are we going to do about it?”

At the state level, since the Texas legislature meets every two years, P16 staff and partners bi-annually identify two or three items to take a stance on and then have action network members go in and watch the legislative process, monitor the conversations and inform staff of whether/when they should write letters and offer testimony. No matter the level of advocacy though, McCormick stresses that there is a difference between politics and policy:

“Policy can be neutral. You can advocate on behalf of students and your community, but without getting into partisanship. It’s figuring out how to do that and not being intimidated by that process. Also, select something to advocate for where you have lots of relationships. You know it’s a chain effect of getting everyone to interpret things the same ways. Because when you have enough of the same interpretation floating around, especially at the state level, you know it’s not always about money. If they hear the same things and testimonies at the state level, then they’ll come back to us for information and ask us questions. Wherever we can build relationships and insert our voice is helpful. It’s about building credibility. And sometimes it’s about practices and information-sharing. You know, like asking education institutions to change their reports so that we can really identify the disaggregated data. And then that usually leads to them asking why were are looking at the disaggregated data, and it just opens up that conversation with the partners that you’re trying to advocate with.”

Key Findings

There were four key findings from the P16 case study that are important to note.

- As a backbone staff, P16 sees their primary role as an educator of the public, their governing Board and the legislature.
- The Board does not need to achieve full consensus in order to move forward with an advocacy agenda, but rather uses a majority vote method.
- Data and credibility are their primary tools of choice,
- They have the most impact at the local level in terms of altering procedural processes and funding priorities.

Case Study 2: Dallas Commit!

Introduction

The Dallas Commit! Partnership is one of the largest collective impact efforts in the country, serving Dallas County, which represents over 10% of all students in Texas. Structurally, Commit! is comprised of 23 full-time staff, one intern/fellow, an 83-member leadership council, six support councils that range from 10 to 30 members each, 100+ investors including corporations, foundation and individuals, and 180+ community partners that are activated in action networks as needed.

The majority of Commit! staff positions have a data focus, with only one staff person (a 60-hour volunteer) dedicated to advocacy.

The Backbone

This staff operates as a backbone for Commit!’s large, cross-sectoral leadership council with representatives from corporations, foundations, school districts, school boards, the legislature and nonprofits. The leadership council then breaks into six different support councils dedicated to Early Childhood, Grades 4-12, Higher Ed/Workforce, Data, Human Capital and Policy. Unlike other Strive initiatives whose work is somewhat fixedly defined by specific programs or projects, these six councils are constantly determining and re-determining the focus and scope of Commit!’s work as they aim to fill the ever-evolving and surfacing needs identified by action networks who are on the ground. The staff’s role is to constantly coordinate, manage and convene these councils and networks

Advocacy Strategies

At any level, Commit!’s involvement in advocacy can range from publishing their logo on another network’s agenda to show support, to sending information out to the public and encouraging people to make calls or write letters, to becoming more public-facing and providing testimony, and to even hiring a lobbyist. The level of involvement depends on the amount of support from the governing board, and most importantly, whether or not there is community buy-in. In particular, Commit! does not advocate for anything without superintendent support, nor do they advocate without strong data to back their claims.

Who Is Involved

Of interest to Generation Next, the Policy Support Council was originally comprised of a bipartisan group of state legislators representing Dallas County, school board members and advocacy experts. However, due to the poor attendance and engagement of legislators, this council now mostly consists of action network members who are early childhood and other subject matter experts, as well as advocates who have access to groups they can mobilize. The council meets around three priorities: 1) convening local advocacy groups to mobilize around a shared purpose or issue, 2) advocating for policies at the local, state or federal level that have been identified by action networks as critical for moving academic indicators and 3) arming elected officials and advocates in the community with data to influence more effective advocacy.

Furthermore, to reach the community in a more grassroots manner, Commit! staff publish and update an advocacy agenda at EarlyMattersDallas.org, a website specifically dedicated to Commit!’s early childhood advocacy efforts that contains legislative priorities, information on bills introduced in the legislature, and ways that community members can get involved. Commit! has been successful in influencing policy by sending out “action alerts” to community members who subscribe to the page, which then inform them to make phone calls and write letters as legislative sessions heat up. Libby McCabe, director of Advocacy and Governance, considers both their direct lobbying and grassroots lobbying strategies to be very successful. As a staff member, she sees Commit!’s role as that of a convener, who ensures everyone

understands the importance of lobbying and how they can engage in advocacy. When action network members recommend policies to the staff, the staff then brings those agenda items to their governing board (a 12-member, decision-making sub-committee of the leadership council), and the governing board then approves or disapproves what Commit! will collectively support.

However, policy agendas are not voted on by the leadership council. Rather, the leadership council is sent updates when decisions have been made. When Commit! first started developing an advocacy agenda, there was a strong push from the leadership council to remain a neutral, non-partisan organization that just served as a trusted data source, but over time Libby says they were able to “wear them down” and get them to understand the importance of advocacy. Now, the leadership council’s role in advocacy at Commit! is essentially non-existent, but their understanding of advocacy’s influence is necessary for the success of an advocacy agenda.

The leadership council is not entirely ignored in the process, though. Leadership council members are considered in the staff’s filtering of policy agenda items. For instance, according to Libby, they stay out of the tricky issues like charter schools and school vouchers because businesses and shareholders in their organization might have widely differing opinions on those issues.

Where They Advocate

Since Commit! represents all of Dallas County, much of their advocacy occurs at the state level because local level advocacy requires them to choose which districts are more deserving of their efforts than others. This inherently creates tension among the districts. Commit!’s local level advocacy activities largely take the form of data distribution and getting information out to the public so they can make an informed vote for their districts. When determining if they should advocate locally, Commit! staff looks at three criteria:

1. Is it going to impact our goals significantly?
2. Do we have strong support from our partners?
3. Do we have the data to back it?

Though Commit! spends most of their time advocating at the state level, their biggest influence lies at the local level due to the nature of long-established relationships and data. Currently at the local level, Commit! is working on educator program accountability and teacher quality, and in fact, Libby recommends that coalitions who are new to advocacy start at the local level talking about issues like human capital because that is an area where much of the data and relationships tend to be readily available.

At the state level, Commit! is most effective when offering data and expertise, especially since they have not developed strong relationships at the state level yet. This became evident when we talked to Libby about Commit!’s advocacy successes.

“I guess our biggest success is, last session we really wanted full-day high quality pre-K funding. And what we had to settle with was a \$118,000,000 grant for districts that opted into high quality. And that was really disappointing. When we realized we were not going to get what we wanted, we pivoted and got a data amendment added, to make sure that all of the data we wanted was collected and publicly reported. And so now,.... we’ll have kindergarten readiness numbers for all the districts. We’ll have teacher ratio numbers. We’ll have who’s offering a half-day, who’s offering a full day. And so we’ll be much more able to assess what’s driving quality. And so I think that’s probably our biggest win.”

Though Commit! was unable to achieve the level of funding they advocated for, they were able to advocate for more data, which will in turn provide them with more persuasive data and insight for future legislative sessions.

Advocacy Challenges

When asked about the most challenging aspects of advocacy, Libby said,

“Winning. It’s just so frustrating that we have zero control. One of our bills last session got hung up because one senator in Amarillo is the head of the committee that decides whether or not to take a vote. He decided he didn’t like it, so he didn’t take a vote. And right now, the pre-K funding we want, well, the Speaker of the House and the governor are pissed at each other. So they’re holding up pre-K in an ego bash. That’s the really most frustrating part.... [Though], I think we’ve really done a good job and put a lot of work into building coalitions, like when I send it out in an action alert, we can get 65 people to call. We’ve done a good job of creating a culture in our area for people not being afraid to call.”

Much of Commit!’s advocacy challenges are contingent on external factors that are beyond the control of the staff, leadership council and action networks, particularly at the state level. However, they are able to rely on grassroots support to ensure that their perspective, at the very least, is heard.

Key Findings

The following key findings from the Dallas Commit! Case study are important to note.

- The Commit! backbone staff see themselves as conveners and distributors of information at both the grassroots and grasstops levels.

- The leadership council are informed about advocacy decisions, but not necessarily involved in making those decisions
- The governing Board determines the types of advocacy activities they engage in.
- Commit!'s power with advocacy efforts primarily lies at the local level due to long-established relationships and access and use of data.
- It is also important to note that where they do not have well-established relationships, they use data and subject matter expertise to add value to the conversation.

Case Study 3: Raise DC

Introduction

Not unlike other collective impact efforts, Raise DC is a cross-sector coalition of high powered partnerships. It includes community providers and local stakeholders and aims to promote policies and practices that spur focused actions. These efforts and actions, it is hoped, will eventually lead to improved educational outcomes for all of the children in the DC area, from cradle to career. While most all of the collective impact organizations we interviewed are heavily focused on data as a part of any advocacy effort, Raise DC was the only site that states its use of data as a metaphorical “flashlight” to not only *prove* impact but to *improve* practice. As a side note, Daniel Sellers indicated that EdAllies follows a similar process; they identify what practices are already working in education, and what barriers those practices face in being implemented and utilized successfully.

According to Laurie Wingate, the Executive Director of Raise D.C., and in conjunction with information on their public website, www.RaiseDC.org makes their collective impact by:

- *Using data as a flashlight*
- *Identifying effective practices*
- *Aligning community resources to fill gaps and spread what works*

All participants have a shared vision for change, as well as a common understanding of the problem and how they will work to collectively solve it.

Several staff are featured in the Data Spotlight Awards segment on the Raise DC website and speak about this approach as a way to promote transparency and increase efficiency in resource allocation as well as effectiveness in addressing student needs.

In partnership with The Office of the State Superintendent for Education, they have facilitated a process of systematically sharing data with nonprofit partners and promoting a collaborative practice to ensure a more formative use of the data. It would seem quite logical that by illuminating the next steps in the learning process, in a timely and relevant manner, the “spotlight” approach is likely to realize significant results. However, without a greater understanding of the data that is being shared, it is difficult to say to what degree the impact

can be attributed to specific data. For example, is the impact due to timeliness of summative data or the ability to employ a more formative approach with real-time information. It is likely this would depend on the granularity of the data itself and perhaps is worth understanding for ultimate impact.

In addition to this emphasis, another important component of the Raise DC collective impact is this idea that the backbone staff establishes important relationships with what they call *Change Networks*; and which is comprised of more than 150 nonprofit and government organizations. Raise DC facilitates relationship building activities by providing opportunities for advocacy efforts to occur and strategically connecting issues to topics for the various members of the leadership council where interests converge.

At the same time, the leadership council, made up of more than 30 multi-sector leaders, charge its backbone staff and operations team with making progress toward its five high level goal areas:

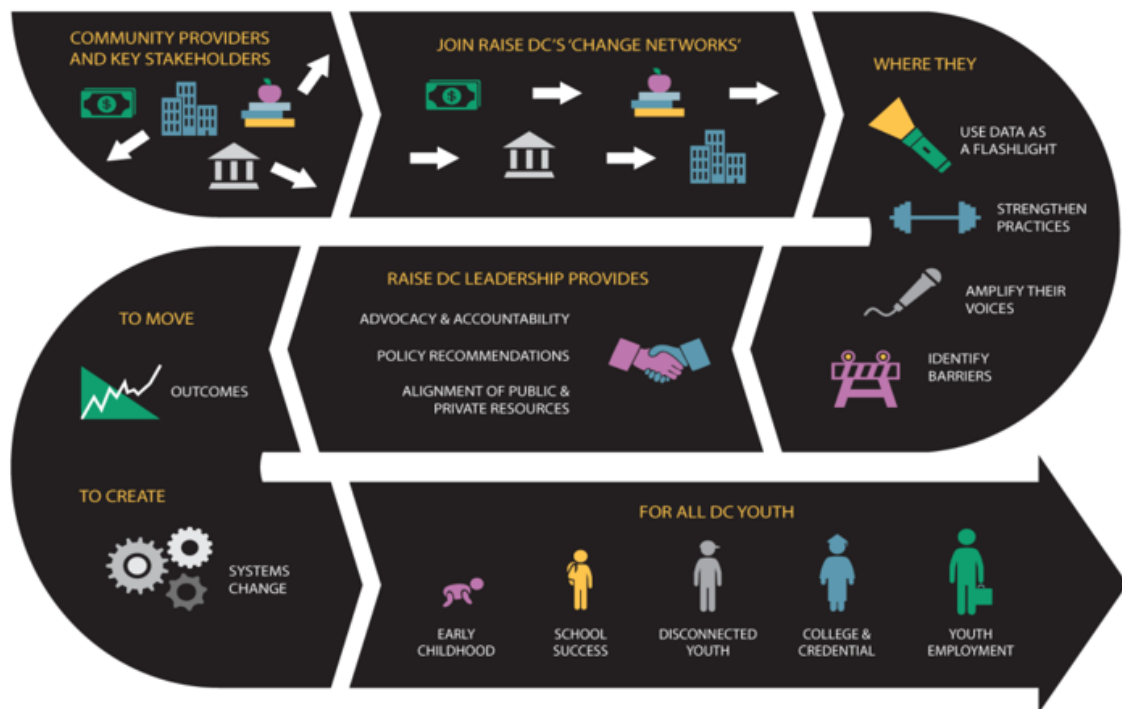
- *Every child prepared for Kindergarten.*
- *Every child graduates from high school.*
- *Every youth who is not in school reconnects to education/training.*
- *Every youth obtains a post-secondary credential.*
- *Every youth is prepared for career.*

The Leadership Council not only recognizes there are many pieces that go into the collective impact effort's success, but demonstrate support for and state publicly on their website a commitment to the following:

- *Align individual and collective action, advocacy, funding and philanthropy to Raise DC's goals using a policy approach by way of their defined Roadmap below*
- *Promote the effective use of data for Raise DC's goals, and commit to championing citywide, data-driven decision-making*
- *Provide leadership, advocacy, counsel, participation, accountability, on-the-ground work, and policy recommendations to the Change Networks*

The following graphic demonstrates the prioritization of advocacy work within their collective impact approach via the Raise DC Roadmap as a way to realize outcomes for all DC youth.

RAISE DC'S ROADMAP



According to Raise DC's 2013 Annual Report card, the Road Map ultimately exists as a catalyst to ensure collective work includes creating a system of supports which includes:

- *Aligning academic and nonacademic supports across all parts of the continuum,*
- *Focusing resources on the most critical outcomes for children and youth,*
- *Using data to identify effective practices that will improve existing programs rather than launching new ones, and*
- *Investing in the sustainability of the work so that it thrives beyond electoral cycles.*

The Backbone

Within the leadership council of Raise DC sits a critical core staff that is “exploited” through the backbone, which is comprised of members from the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region. They sit as an independent entity within the community foundation serving as, for all intensive purposes, the backbone, to the backbone. This has created some real benefits in terms of funding in the early stages of the coalition and continues to have relational benefits in ways that other backbone structures may not be able to enjoy. Furthermore, they are the fiscal sponsor, providing back office support and physical as well as personnel services. Yet, they have an executive director who conducts independent fundraising.

The organization, that is the backbone structure itself, does receive an extensive amount of in kind donations from the foundation. Currently, the budget is built independently by the

backbone structures executive director supported by the office manager and ultimately funds seven full-time positions comprised of an executive director, deputy director, commons manager, a program associate, data manager, two senior leadership positions associated with post-secondary career readiness on one end and early childhood and elementary work on the younger end.

The operations staff is comprised of identified leads in the Change Networks which are collaborations developed around key issues and includes community stakeholder, nonprofits and advocacy partners. This aspect of RaiseDC's organizational structure appears absent from the Generation Next model and perhaps is worth some additional investigation for consideration as one way to reduce potential risks associated with advocating around issues where the Leadership Council may not be in agreement. The idea that Change Networks help the Backbone identify, articulate and even push the issues and lead the advocacy work with some level of support from the coalition seems to be a strategy that is working well for RaiseDC. In the following pages, we provide some examples of how this work is conducted without jeopardizing the cohesive attributes of the Leadership Council as a powerful coalition.

Advocacy Strategies

When RaiseDC makes full use of its partnerships with change networks and community partners to identify and assess issues or topics as it relates to policy work, they are seeing real results. Two examples were shared in an interview with the deputy director involving youth disconnection rates and transportation vouchers.

Youth disconnection rates were an important issue for the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates (DCAYA) and providing these students with a state awarded high school diploma was an idea that RaiseDC valued internally, and yet were unable to support publicly until members of important Boards, which were operated by leadership council members themselves, could secure buy-in from its own members.

This particular situation illuminated how leveraging the right people to push the policy issue, while ensuring members of RaiseDC adequately understood the policy itself; and at the same time, facilitating coordinated efforts with community partners happened simultaneously and resulted in major win. The process in its entirety took more than a year, but the persistence, patience and positioning work allowed RaiseDC to capitalize on the change networks, their community partners and leverage the power and resources of their leadership council at the same time.

Similarly, an issue related to securing transportation vouchers was elevated as a need, secured through a city brokered deal where the leadership council didn't necessarily "carry the water" on the topic, rather one of DCAYA led the charge. The support the leadership council was able to provide for the moving of this policy decision was key, but ultimately the backbone staff orchestrated most of the deal through the strategic use of its

Advocacy Challenges

In spite of their success, RaiseDC is not without its own challenges when it comes to executing advocacy efforts that involve systems change. In an interview with the a high level staff member we learned that while the leadership coalition is powerful and resource rich, it is extremely complex and mired in politics and history and has an intricate network of multi-sector entities that require major skills to navigate. The advantage of partnering with advocacy agents and others doing the work in the designated space is that Raise DC has options. Despite these challenges, the fact that they surround themselves with multiple options when it comes to choosing “how” the advocacy effort eventually unfolds is unique and important to their ability to experience success.

Finally, Raise DC admits they are challenged by the idea of tackling all five high level outcome areas: (early childhood, school success, disconnected youth, college credentialing and youth employment), at the same time. This is worth noting as an important aspect of understanding one’s internal capacity is making sure existing resources are laser focused on the right topic, at the right time for optimum results.

Key Findings

The primary learnings from our conversation with Raise DC can be summed up in the following ways.

- The backbone must have key staff or access to subject matter expertise with strong “policy legs” locally and a solid understanding of the role advocacy plays in systems change.
- Established relationships with advocacy networks and community partners is key. An action step for the backbone structure to always consider is to find ways to convene the various actors at the program and policy field levels as a way to provide a unique opportunity for learning that leads to new understandings and creative coalitions where key efforts converge and result in greater impact.
- An important aspect of advocacy work involves understanding that policy issues are often times “floating around” and the nuances that surround them, such as timing, who it is that champions the issue, how and when to galvanize your networks; and what it takes to carefully navigate the political aspects playing out at the leadership level, matters greatly. Synchronizing efforts is the key to success, but so is patience, persistence and determination. Ensuring multiple ways in which leadership can engage on an agenda item is a strategy RaiseDC has used as a way for the coalition to remain free of entanglements with issues it may agree with on the one hand, but for political or other reasons, simply cannot fully or publicly support.
- It is not just the unique access to data that matters, rather it is the “use” of the data for multiple purposes that makes a difference, i.e. to establish hard evidence for impact, evaluation, decision-making or to generate actionable next steps.
- Transparency and data sharing are also key.
- Creating systematic ways to share data among and between community and nonprofit partners who aim to interact and improve aspects of the educational experience in ways

that impact the outcomes. This is evidenced by the Data Spotlight Awards administered by Raise DC themselves. If indeed a Backbone organizations is uniquely situated because of their access to data, then this should be an important distinction of ways it can leverage that uniqueness.

Case Study 4: The Albany Promise

Introduction

The Albany Promise is a Strive Network member of great interest to our research, as their work and successes have gained national recognition and are well known in the Strive community. The Albany Promise launched in 2012 and its backbone is housed by the University of Alabama. Three staff are dedicated to the anchor entity, a Director, a Community Engagement Manager, and a Facilitator. Their Executive Committee is made up of 18 leadership members, all of whom are high-level executives in corporations, foundations, nonprofits, and higher education institutions. Their partnership is made up of over 60 organizations in the Albany, New York area.

The Backbone

Interestingly, those at Albany recognize the backbone of any cradle to career partnership as more than just a single entity or role, “but rather, a set of functions that are essential to moving the partnership forward and deliver results.” The Albany approach recognizes the ever changing needs of the partnerships as even since their own inception in 2013, they have themselves had to be flexible when pushing forward solutions in particular areas.

Advocacy Strategy

Policy work for The Albany Promise is driven by its action networks, made up of various members of their coalition/partnership. According to Juliette Price, the Director of Albany Promise, “if they’re working on a specific issue and they can either prove that there’s a policy that works and so a policy should be adopted around it, or it can identify a policy barrier given that specific project, then that’s when we would start working on policy.” According to their 2014 Report Card, they have at least two action team networks: the Early Childhood Success Action Team and the 3rd and 4th Grade Success Action Team.

Director Juliette Price describes their advocacy strategy as having a narrow, local focus. The staff feel that policy work is much more feasible at a local level with strong data. She described their organizational work and theory of change to be focused at the school district level, where changes can be recommended based on rigorous data from the actual locale where it is to be implemented. Some examples the staff member gave for local policy issues they had worked on were implementing a district wide kindergarten readiness assessment, implementing a non-social promotion policy in a specific network of charter schools, and advocating for a model

for early childhood developmental screening “to make sure that health care providers are actually being held accountable for making sure that our 0-3 population receives services.”

Advocacy Challenges

According to Director Price, the most important component of a successful advocacy strategy is the data that supports the coalition’s advocacy work. One of the biggest challenges they noted in advocacy work was that people “try to jump to it too fast” without rigorously aggregating and analyzing data that supports the intervention. At Albany Promise, their work has evolved over the past five years to incorporate strategies with an immense amount of rigor, shifting the way actors in the area think about advocacy. The staff member notes that they are implementing a form of policy work that asks partnership members to step back before signing onto an advocacy agenda as they have traditionally done, and ask critical questions like: “Does pre-k [for example] actually work? Do the kids who attend pre-k show up to kindergarten more ready to learn than those who don’t?” She describes this rigorous data-driven focus as “getting people to slow down enough to actually focus on what good policy would look like.”

Key Findings

An important lesson from Director Price and The Albany Promise for Generation Next is in Albany’s strategy for deciding which issues to work on and advocate for and in their focus on utilizing strong data for success in their advocacy work. Other key learnings are summarized here:

- The issues that The Albany Promise adopts to pursue in their advocacy work are driven by the members of the Action Teams who have been engaged in work around that issue and who are most equipped and motivated to champion the advocacy work. Issues are not adopted arbitrarily and do not require a great deal of consensus building in the partnership, as they arise in the Action Teams’ research and work on the ground and build buy in organically that way.
- Strong data is a necessary component of advocacy. While issues may bubble up from various areas of work in coalitions, those policy interventions that cannot be backed by rigorous data collection and analysis are not viable as an advocacy agenda item. Strive coalitions advocacy strengths lie in their size, relative neutrality, and data.
- Efforts to strengthen and effectively present these data should be a primary focus before, or when engaging in, advocacy work on any issue.

Case Study 5: A Non-Strive Collaborative: healthTIDE of Wisconsin

We also conducted a final, condensed case study (not in summary table) on a statewide health collaborative in Wisconsin called *healthTIDE*. Since this coalition is different from Generation Next and the other Strive partnerships in fundamental ways that affect the potential for advocacy, this case study was less detailed and formal, but did include a phone interview with one of their staff members.

healthTIDE's network includes over 1500 partners statewide; it is comprised of organizations involved in all facets of health and wellbeing. Their backbone organization includes approximately seven staff members. Though their collaborative was founded upon the collective impact framework, our interview with one staff member indicated that their work only loosely follows the model; they are selective in the aspects of the collective impact model they adhere to in terms of which aspects actually serve the partnership's needs. The facets of the model that do not serve them are adapted to healthTIDE's needs where they see fit.

healthTIDE's website stated its two current advocacy agenda items: one centered around Wisconsin's *Youngstar* program (a childcare quality rating and improvement system) and the other centered around a Wisconsin piece of legislation related to physical education in schools. The staff member we interviewed described these two policy items as successes the collaborative experienced in its advocacy work. The staff member also explained that the partnership used to have a designated advocacy team; but this did not work out as planned and was ultimately dissolved. The members of the team found extreme difficulty in coming to a consensus around advocacy issues, and they were unable to get the necessary "muscle" behind their advocacy efforts as the partners who were engaged in advocacy weren't aligned in their organizational work and motivation. Many people at the table weren't particularly passionate or informed about the issues at hand, and were not willing or able to invest significant time and effort into the cause.

Their success in pushing forward the *Youngstar* program was a result of effective work with the right partners on the right issue, at the local level. healthTIDE's Early Childhood "stakeholder" team (much like one of Strive's action networks) identified the issue as a strong, important, and worthy cause. They gained the support and momentum of willing partner advocates on that team whose organizations had an explicit interest in the cause, and now describe that work as a success. Their work on the physical education legislation was initiated by one of their large and powerful partners, the American Heart Association, who was designated to push the legislation by their national office. healthTIDE was able to coordinate effective advocacy efforts around this, the staff member says, because the major muscle came from the AHA and other partners who were willing to join in on the effort because they weren't required to contribute significant time or effort. The staff member notes that the AHA finds healthTIDE a useful resource for adding momentum to their work, as the backbone staff helps identify other partners in the coalition to work on specific issues as they are identified at the AHA.

Now, healthTIDE convenes a group of three to five individuals from partner organizations involved in advocacy roughly twice each year to discuss advocacy strategies around childhood obesity issues. They do not engage in community organizing, but they do provide systematic support, funding, and training to community organizers as they (the staff member) believe that

it is a necessary aspect of systems change. They focus on making connections and building relationships between organizations who are aligned in their work, and convening leaders and experts in issues to drive change both from the grassroots and grasstops levels.

Appendix 8. Issues Mapping

Our analysis shows that full consensus is not necessary to pursue advocacy efforts. However, to aid Generation Next in finding and building consensus among the leadership council, we have created preliminary Issues Maps so that Generation Next can: 1) Visually see where its leadership council members seem to prioritize the same issues publicly and are perhaps interconnected, 2) Develop a sense of which education policies may appeal to the overall council as well as to each of its individual members, 3) Re-structure the leadership council and/or bring in new council members to fill out the issue areas that are currently lacking strong support either generally or lacking support in a particular sector, and 4) Frame education issues in a manner that would be appealing to its council members in an effort to build consensus.

We identified the seven issue areas (Workforce Development, Access and Equity, Choice, Innovation, Early Childhood, Poverty and Health) based on the priorities each council member's organization listed in their mission statements, values statements and/or programming descriptions. Though these seven issue areas do not directly appeal to the six goal areas of Generation Next, these are the priorities that appeared most prominently on the websites of Generation Next leadership council members. Without access to the council members themselves, we have to assume that each of them will advocate on behalf of their organization's written values. With this limitation in mind we are able to make sweeping observations, such as an healthy majority (over 50%) of Generation Next's leadership council supports education because they care about access and equity, whereas only about 20% of the leadership council cares about early childhood.

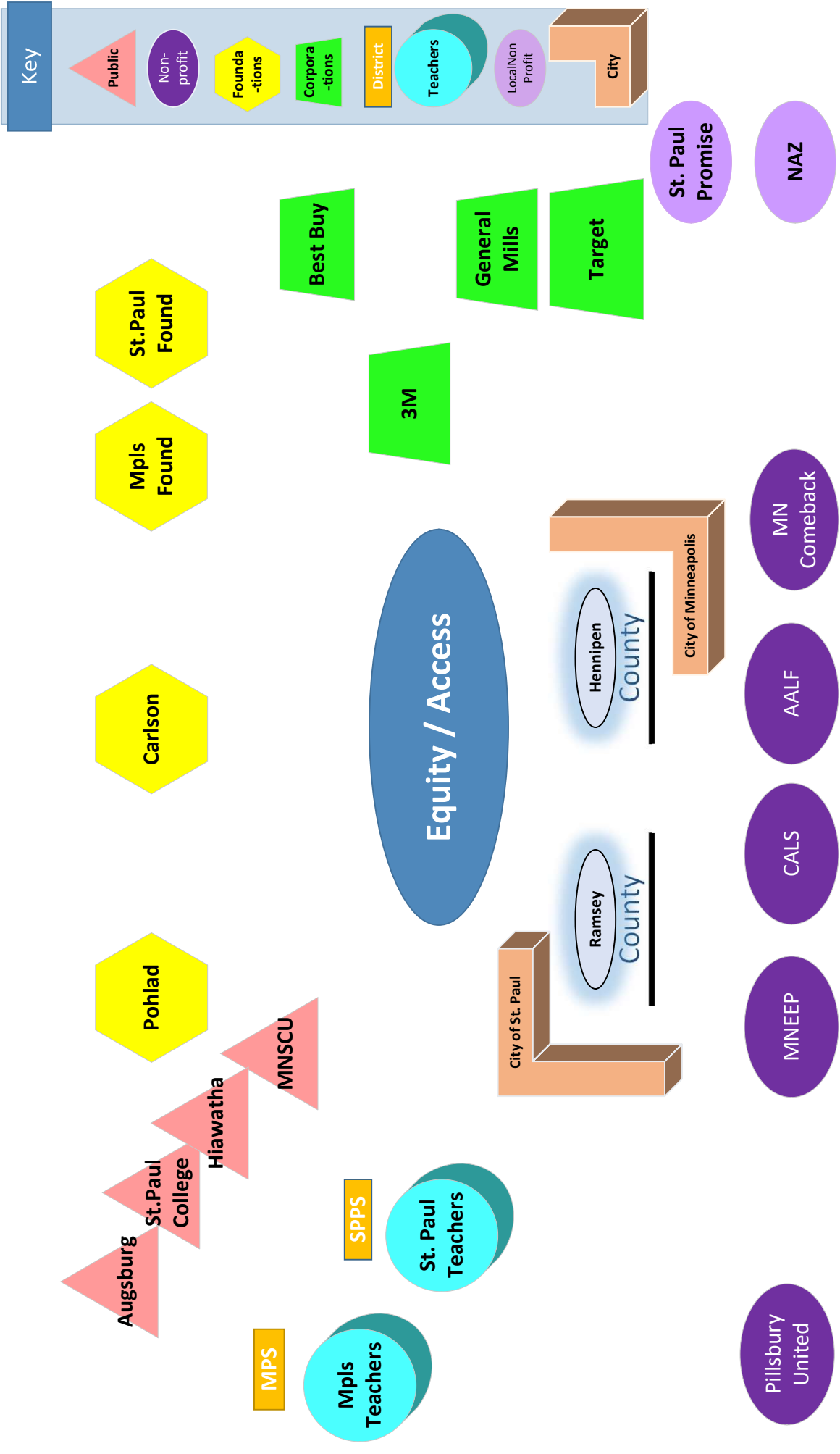
As you will also notice, if a leadership council entity claims to prioritize more than one of these issues on its website, that entity will appear on each of those issues maps. For example, 3M can be seen on the maps of Workforce Development, Access and Equity and Choice. This means that 3M chooses to be involved in discussions surrounding education because they believe education plays a key role in issues surrounding workforce development, access and equity and choice. So if, for instance, Generation Next wanted to formally advocate for more Pre-K funding, though 3M does not self-identify as caring about early childhood issues, Generation Next might gain their approval on this issue by framing Pre-K funding as an issue that directly contributes to access and equity.

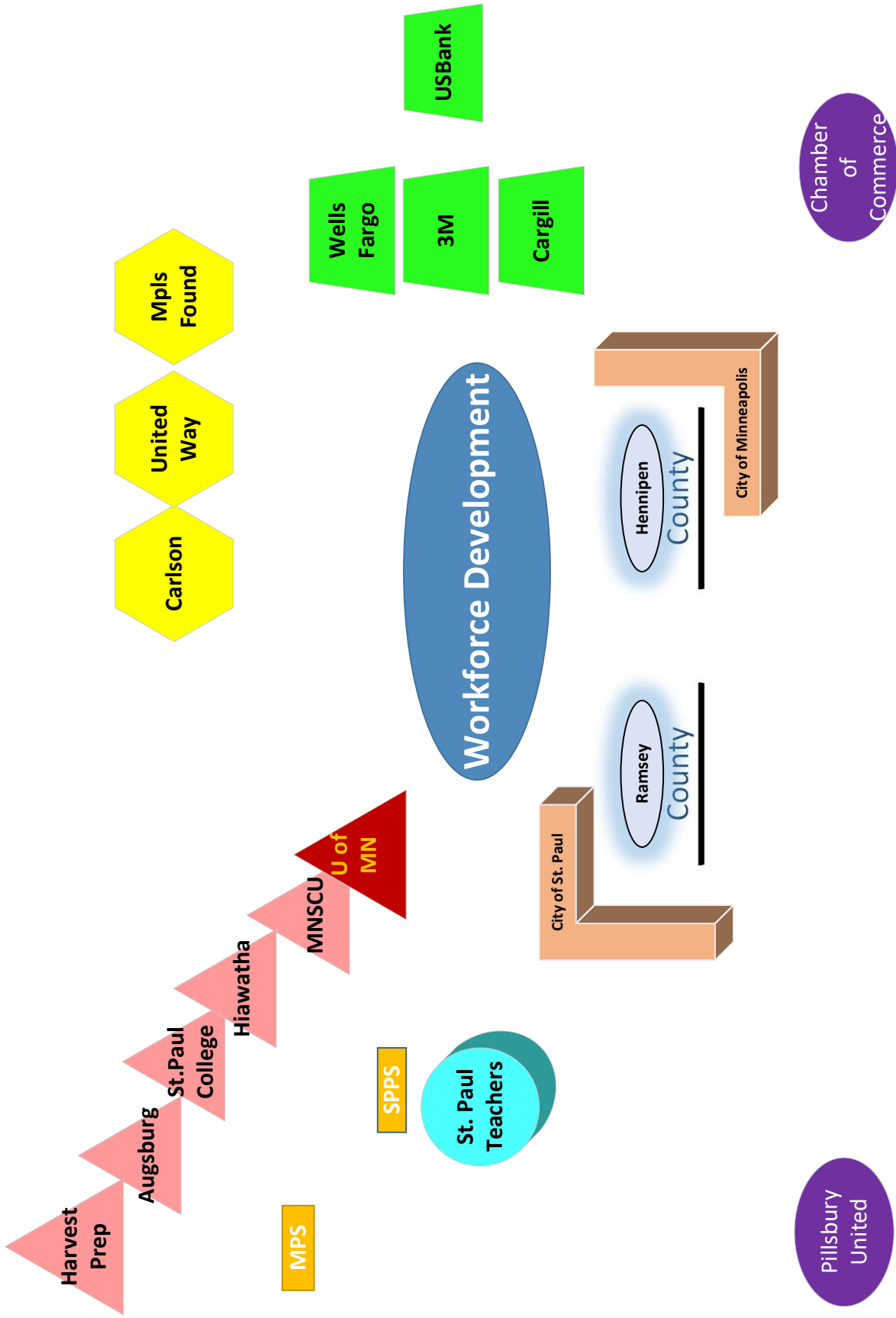
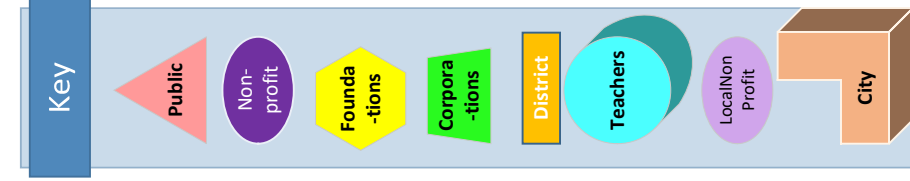
Additionally, the organizations are color-coded based on the sector they represent: red for education and public-governing institutions, purple for nonprofits, green for corporations and

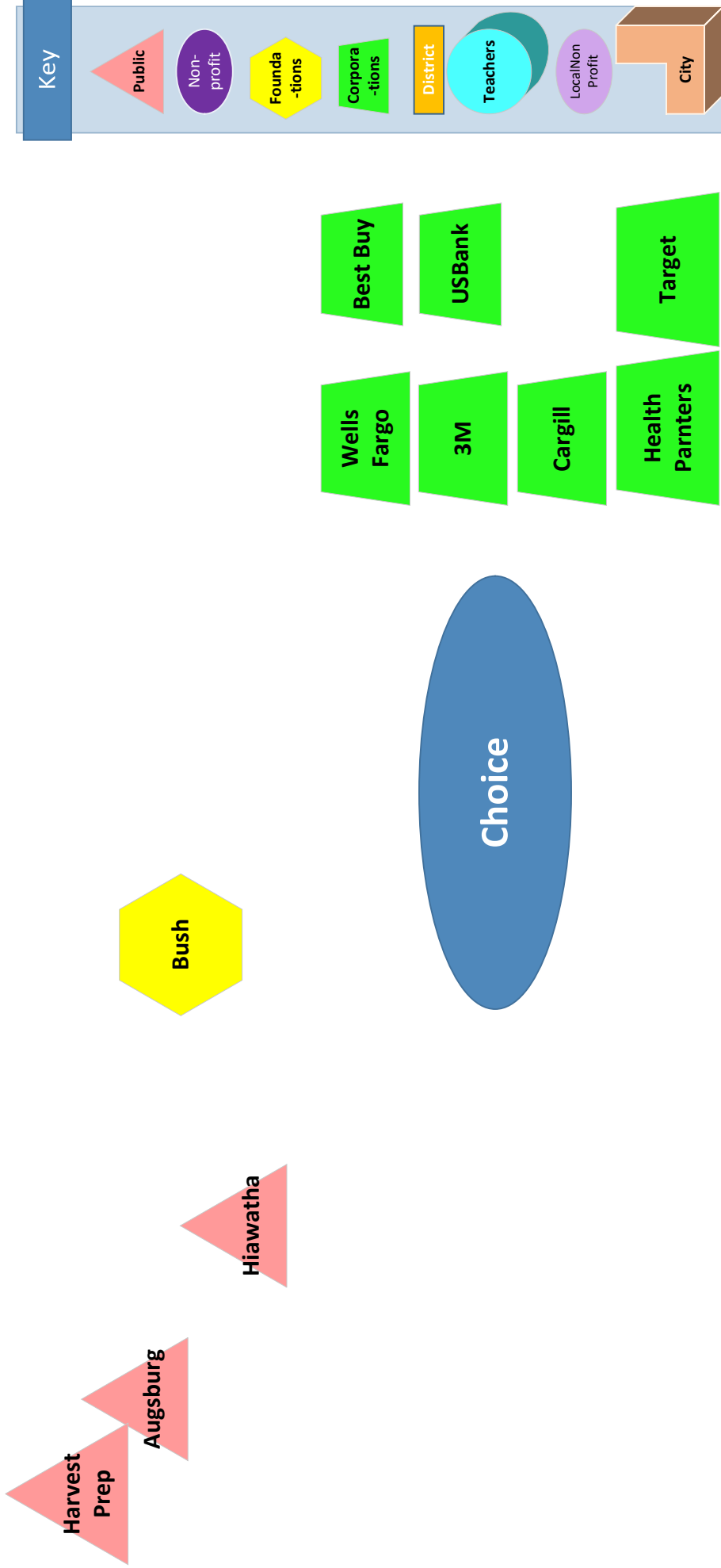
yellow for foundations. This coloring shows the balance of perspectives at each issue table. So if, for instance, you need to obtain testimonials from frontline leaders (those in education institutions and nonprofits) about the value of early childhood education, perhaps Generation Next would consider garnering more leadership council-level support of nonprofits dedicated to early childhood. Or, if Generation Next feels that gathering corporate voices would be more powerful in paving the road to more Pre-K Funding, then there is a clear need to invest more time speaking with current corporate council members or to research other corporations more likely to support early childhood advocacy efforts, as none of the corporations currently on the council have a written identified interest in early childhood issues.

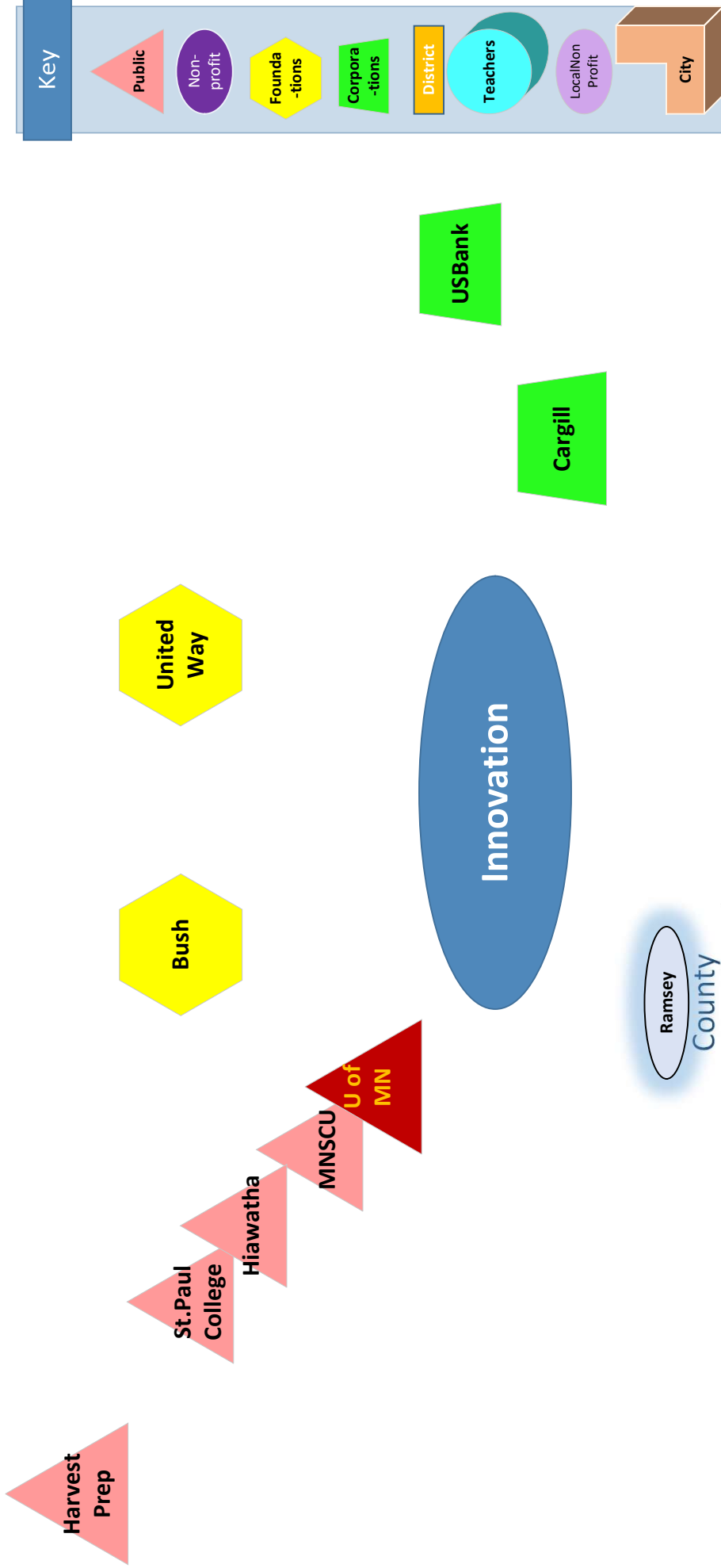
Given that the Issues Map identifies the interrelated interests of the leadership council, as well as visually represents sectoral participation across these interrelated interests, Generation Next may find this map most useful in the developmental stages of its advocacy work to assess both existing and lacking support, and to determine what framing and consensus-building might look like for a particular policy.

Please see the next pages for the issues map examples.









USBank

Cargill

Innovation

Ramsey
County

MN
Comeback

Chamber
of
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